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The Monastic School of Gaza



BROURIA BITTON-ASHKELONY
& ARYEH KOFSKY

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The Monastic School of Gaza

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The Monastic School of Gaza

by

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For Tom, Dana, and Edith

CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations	ix
Introduction	1
I. The Birth and Flourishing of a Monastic Centre	6
II. Peter the Iberian and the Anti-Chalcedonian Resistance in Palestine	47
III. Peter the Iberian: In the Footsteps of Moses	62
IV. The Invisible Holy Men: Barsanuphius and John	82
V. Counseling Through Enigmas	107
VI. The Usefulness of Sin	127
VII. The Necessity of Penitence, <i>Bear One Another's Burdens</i> (Gal. 6:2)	145
VIII. Spiritual Exercises: The Continuous Conversation of the Mind with God	157
IX. Daily Life	183
X. Social Interaction	197
XI. The Fate of the Anti-Chalcedonian Monastic Community	213
Conclusion	223
Bibliography	226
Index	239

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
CS	Cistercian Studies Series
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
SC	Sources chrétiennes
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur

INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking chapters in the history of late antique monastic culture is provided by the monastic legacy of Gaza. At the same time that the great centre of monasticism thrived in the Judean Desert from the fourth century on, a monastic intellectual community flourished in the region of Gaza from the fourth to the seventh century, producing a wealth of literary works: monastic instructions, historical and hagiographic treatises, *erotapokriseis*, letters, and polemical compositions. In this diverse and exciting literary corpus—especially in the unique correspondence between spiritual leaders and their clientele—matters that are only hinted at in, for instance, the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and the hagiography of the Judean Desert are vividly portrayed. Distinct from the dry and matter-of-fact monastic instructions and the stereotypes of hagiography, this corpus exposes the psychological tensions, moods, frustrations, and elations in the daily existence of the monks and their leaders, revealing them as creatures of flesh and blood.

Unfortunately for Gaza monasticism, no historian emerged from its ranks to relate its events as Theodoret of Cyrrhus did for the lives of the Syrian monks.¹ Nor did it have a hagiographer like Cyril of Scythopolis, who sketched the principal stages of development of Judean Desert monasticism through the *vitae* of its outstanding monks.² Derwas J. Chitty, in his pioneering survey of Palestinian monasticism, included short descriptions of the main stages in the development of monasticism in the Gaza region.³ But the historical framework

¹ Theodoret of Cyrrus, *Historia religiosa*, ed. and trans. P. Canivet and A. L. Molinghen, SC 234, 257 (Paris, 1977, 1979), Eng. trans. R. M. Price (Kalamazoo, 1985), CS 88. For an analysis of Syrian monasticism according to Theodoret, see P. Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr*, *Théologie Historique* 42 (Paris, 1977).

² E. Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (Leipzig, 1939), Eng. trans. R. M. Price (Kalamazoo, 1991), CS 114. For an evaluation and analysis of the body of Cyril's historical and literary work, see B. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l'oeuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis* (Paris, 1983).

³ D. J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 72–77, 103–5, 132–40. For brief historical surveys, see also S. Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection* (London, 1984), pp. 83–92; L. Perrone, "Monasticism in the Holy Land: From the Beginnings to the

and contextual development of this monastic community remained vague and fragmentary. Neither has archeological research, so far, broadened our knowledge of the fate of Gaza monasticism. We have no inclusive archeological study of the region, no scientific publications regarding sites excavated recently or in the past.⁴ However, while the historical-geographic picture of Gaza monasticism remains fairly hazy, based primarily on texts written from the end of the fourth century to the second half of the sixth, its intellectual profile emerges with great clarity, thanks to its literary heritage. Recent decades have yielded quite a few studies on monasticism in late antique Palestine, especially in the Judean Desert and Sinai.⁵ The monastic community of Gaza, which developed a physiognomy of its own, tended to be relatively ignored until the early 1990s, except for a number of historical overviews, short studies of specific issues, and some editions and translations of the sources, notably by René Draguet, Lucien Regnault and his fellow monks at Solesmes, and François Neyt.⁶ This neglect was apparently due to the dearth of critical editions of some of the important texts written in these monastic circles (such as the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah and the rich collection of *Questions and Answers* of Barsanuphius and John), as well as to the relative inaccessibility of their printed Greek editions in the West. The fact that the monastic anti-Chalcedonian sources of Gaza were preserved mostly in Syriac additionally accounts for this lacuna in academic research. This situation has been radically changed thanks to the publication of the Sources Chrétiennes edition of the *Questions and Answers* of Barsanuphius and John. In recent years we have witnessed a burgeoning scholarly interest in these sources, which

Crusaders,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 45 (1995), pp. 48–52; idem, “I padri del monachesimo di Gaza IV–VI: la fedeltà allo spirito delle origini,” *La Chiesa nel Tempo* 13 (1997), pp. 87–116.

⁴ For a recent partial archeological survey of the monastic remains in the region, see Y. Hirschfeld, “The Monasteries of Gaza: An Archaeological Survey,” in B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 61–88.

⁵ Flusin, *Miracle et Histoire*; Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven, 1992); J. Patrich, *Sabas—Leader of Palestinian Monasticism* (Washington D. C., 1994); J. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314–631* (Oxford, 1994); R. Solzbacher, *Mönche, Pilger und Sarazenen—Studien zum Frühchristentum auf der südlichen Sinaihalbinsel—Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn islamischer Herrschaft* (Altenberge, 1989); U. Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai in the Byzantine Period: The Archaeological Remains* (Jerusalem, 2000).

⁶ These studies and text editions will be specified in various chapters of the book.

has already produced several Ph.D. dissertations⁷ as well as short topical studies.⁸ By devoting this work to the monastic culture in this region, which incorporates our earlier and new research, we wish to contribute to this renewed effort and to broaden the picture of Palestinian monasticism in late antiquity.

Much of this book seeks to frame the historical development of this community and to depict and analyze the spiritual and intellectual context represented in the sources of what may be termed the monastic school of Gaza. This study begins with the anchoritic phase initiated by Hilarion in the early fourth century, its gradual transformation into a mainly coenobitic monastic community flourishing in the fifth-sixth centuries, and its disappearance in the early days of Muslim rule (chapter 1). This monastic colony retained earlier monastic traditions yet developed its own intellectual profile and nuances of ascetic behaviour. Its uniqueness is reflected in its spiritual leaders as teachers whose fundamental characteristic was their living relationship with their disciples. This charismatic and authoritative spiritual leadership also raised the flag of obedience as the outstanding principle of coenobitic monasticism, and organized life around it.

With the consolidation of the monastic centre in Gaza in the first half of the fifth century, and in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon, this centre became the stronghold of anti-Chalcedonian resistance in Palestine. Against the background of the patriarchate of Jerusalem's recruitment of Judean Desert and Jerusalem monastics to the Chalcedonian camp, the monasticism of Gaza and the coast became an alternative that attracted intellectual monks, who strengthened the relationship with the secular intellectual centre in Gaza. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the political-ecclesiastical role of the holy places during the Christological conflict. These chapters argue that the *Life of Peter the Iberian* was important in representing the Christological polemic and, in the wake of Chalcedon, played a major role in the radical

⁷ J.-E. Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture* (Piscataway, 2002); H. Harper, "Letters to the Great Old Man: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza," Ph.D. dissertation (Princeton University, 2000); C. B. Horn, "Beyond Theology: The Career of Peter the Iberian in the Christological Controversies of Fifth-Century Palestine," Ph.D. dissertation (The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 2001).

⁸ See, for example, B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2004).

anti-Chalcedonian camp in Palestine led by Peter the Iberian and his circle.

Gaza monasticism reached its apogee in the sixth century, at the time of Barsanuphius (the Great Old Man), when it became Chalcedonian. The fate of the anti-Chalcedonian monastic community and the survival of its monastic legacy in Byzantine monasticism is discussed in the last chapter of this study. From that time the monastic leaders of Gaza were accepted as the leaders of Orthodox Christianity in general in Palestine. Their new status can be seen especially in the correspondence of heads of the Church and of the provincial government with Barsanuphius. A centre for classical studies, with its famous school of rhetoric, flourished simultaneously in the city of Gaza. The vicinity of the monastic centre to the intellectual circle in Gaza led to some interaction between the leaders of the monastic community and prominent intellectuals such as the famous sophist Aeneas of Gaza. With the Islamic conquest, the historical sources fell silent, and this community sank into oblivion. Nevertheless, the spiritual heritage of Gaza penetrated the heart of the late Byzantine monastic tradition and constituted in fact a spiritual foundation for Orthodox monasticism in Byzantium and for Slavic monasticism.

The present study is comparative in nature. Key issues are examined in relation to the writings of the most important theologian of early monasticism, Evagrius Ponticus, whose impact on the monastic tradition was incalculable. In addition, the religious perceptions and way of life of the Gaza monastic community are compared with other sources of authority and influence in the monastic world—namely, the Pachomian corpus, the ascetic writings of Basil of Caesarea and Cassian, and Syrian monastic rules. These comparisons aim to probe the formation of the Gaza spiritual school and its affinity with Egyptian monastic tradition and Greek philosophy. Leaving out many aspects of ascetic life, this study focuses on topics touching on the inner landscape of the monk, although the sources in themselves do not offer any systematic exposition of monastic lore. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with crucial aspects of monastic culture—namely, sin and its remedy, penitence. The multifarious manifestations of sin, in practice and in thought, are the cornerstone of monastic ethics and psychology. Monastic life is in fact an ongoing process, of gaining a self-awareness of sin and of self-reform. The practical and theoretical discussion of sin and penitence in the writings of Gaza monas-

ticism are influenced by Evagrian definitions of monastic psychology and ethics. However, it is adapted and further developed to suit the needs of a semi-anchoretic, and later coenobitic, monastic community and finds a theological framework in the writings of Abba Isaiah, Barsanuphius and Dorotheus.

The unique character of the monastic school of Gaza is most apparent in the peculiarity of its spiritual exercises; here it is mainly the theme of individual prayers that is analyzed (chapter 8). From this discussion the school of Gaza emerges not only as deeply rooted in earlier monastic traditions but also as a dynamic and creative circle of religious thought and practice.

The monastic community conceives of the outside world as a constant threat to its fragile existence. This sense of danger generates a reserved and suspicious attitude to the world beyond the monastic confines, and results in a detailed set of rules of behaviour toward visitors and outsiders. The complex issue of relations among the monks of the community, influenced by the inherent tension between hermitic ideals and the social realities of coenobitic life, is elaborated in chapter 9, as is the day-to-day existence of the monk in the community.

The monastic community and its leaders serve as a spiritual focus for the surrounding countryside and nearby urban communities, where the leaders fulfill the role of the holy man as a teacher and spiritual patron. This well-known late antique phenomenon of charismatic leadership, with its regional idiosyncrasies, is presented in chapters 4 and 5.

In this study we have endeavoured to portray the monastic school of Gaza as a complex and thriving monastic centre whose legacy cuts across theological differences and boundaries. It is fortunate that the rich literary corpus of Gaza monasticism has enabled us to delve into the inner spiritual life of its protagonists. We hope that acquaintance with these educated circles will enhance and somewhat balance the overall historical picture of late antique Palestinian monasticism.

We would like to thank Evelyn Katrak for her rigorous editing of the manuscript. We are grateful for the financial support provided by the Israel Science Foundation (founded by the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities). Special thanks are due to our dear spouses, Ilan and Bettina, for sharing our enthusiasm for a topic so remote from their own intellectual pursuits.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF A MONASTIC CENTRE

This chapter traces the successive stages in the development of the Gaza monastic community from an anchoritic to a coenobitic way of life, and delineates its peculiar profile in a way that provides a historical framework for the further study of its unique culture.¹

Gaza monasticism in late antiquity, unlike its Judean Desert counterpart, developed not as a desert monasticism but on the fringes of a pagan and Christian urban cultural centre and surrounded by a flourishing rural area.² Important historical events in Egypt, and particularly in the monastic colony at Scetis, toward the end of the fourth century and in the first half of the fifth, led to the establishment and intellectual flowering of the monastic centre at Gaza.³ At

¹ This pattern of development was common to several monastic communities. See P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford, 1978); Chitty, *The Desert a City*.

² On the rural character of Gaza monasticism, see L. Di Segni, "Monastero, città e villaggio nella Gaza Bizantina," in S. Chialà and L. Cremaschi (eds.), *Il deserto di Gaza: Barsanufio, Giovanni e Doroteo. Atti dell'XI Convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa sezione bizantina*. Bose, 14–16 settembre 2003 (Bose, 2004), pp. 51–80. For the similar development of Alexandrian monasticism, see E. Wipszycka, "Le monachisme Égyptien et les villes," *Travaux et mémoires* 12 (1994), pp. 1–44, esp. p. 14. The spread of Christianity in Gaza in the fourth and fifth centuries is discussed in Z. Rubin, "Christianity in Byzantine Palestine—Missionary Activity and Religious Coercion," in L. I. Levine (ed.), *Jerusalem Cathedra* 3 (Jerusalem and Detroit, 1983), pp. 97–113; idem, "Porphyrius of Gaza and the Conflict between Christianity and Paganism in Southern Palestine," in A. Kofsky and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land First–Fifteenth Centuries C.E.* (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 31–66; R. Van Dam, "From Paganism to Christianity at Late Antique Gaza," *Viator* 16 (1985), pp. 1–20; G. Mussies, "Marnas God of Gaza," ANRW 18.4 (Berlin, New York, 1990), pp. 2413–57; F. R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and the Christianization c. 370–529*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1993), pp. 187–245; P. Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens* (Paris, 1990), pp. 82–84; L. Perrone, "Monasticism as a Factor of Religious Interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine Period," in Kofsky and Stroumsa (eds.), *Sharing the Sacred*, pp. 74–75. On cultural life in the city of Gaza in the Byzantine period, see G. Downey, *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century* (Norman, 1963); Y. Dan, *The City in Eretz-Israel during the Late Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Jerusalem, 1984) (in Hebrew); C. A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, BAR International Series 325 (Oxford, 1987).

³ For a brief survey of the monastic colony at Scetis, see Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 66–74; J.-C. Guy, "Le centre monastique de Scété dans la littérature du V^e siècle," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1964), pp. 129–47.

the end of the fourth century the Origenist controversy brought turbulence to Egyptian desert monasticism. Monks suspected of Origenist leanings were persecuted, and some of the many who fled Scetis found refuge in the Gaza area.⁴ In addition, during the first half of the fifth century the waves of invading Mazices—barbarian tribes—thinned the ranks of the monastic centre at Scetis. Again, many of its monks wandered beyond the Egyptian border, and also ended up in the Gaza area.⁵ Late evidence for these events is preserved in a seventh-century text, *The Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus, which cites the following story from Abba Irenaeus: “When barbarians came to Scetis, I withdrew and came to the district of Gaza, where I accepted a cell for myself in the laura.” He relates further that the superior of the laura gave him a book of “Sayings of the Elders”—that is, of the Desert Fathers.⁶ It may be that the refugees included the spiritual leaders of Gaza monasticism; in the mid-fifth century, Abba Isaiah of Egypt was among the most notable of their number. The immigration of key figures such as Abba Isaiah and Barsanuphius during the fifth and sixth centuries to the Gaza area, where a kernel of monastic settlement had existed since the fourth century, led in fact to the transfer of the Scetis monastic intellectual centre to Gaza.

While Judean Desert monasticism in late antiquity grew to a large extent around the holy places, looking to Jerusalem as the holy city, this was not the case with Gaza monasticism.⁷ As reflected in the *Life of Hilarion*—the first Palestinian monk from the Gaza region known to us—Gaza monasticism throughout this period is marked by the influence of Egyptian monasticism.⁸ At the same time, Gaza

⁴ On the Origenist controversy at the end of the fourth century, see A. Guillaumont, *Les ‘Képhalaia Gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens* (Paris, 1962), pp. 47–123; E. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, 1992).

⁵ The invasion of Scetis by the Mazices in the first half of the fifth century is discussed in H. G. Evelyn-White, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (New York, 1932), pp. 150–67.

⁶ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 55, PG 87/3, 2909b Eng. trans. I. Wortley (Kalamazoo, 1992), CS 139, p. 44.

⁷ On the connection between Judean Desert monasticism and the holy places, see R. L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, 1992), pp. 151–72.

⁸ S. Rubenson, “The Egyptian Relations of Early Palestinian Monasticism,” in A. O’Mahony, G. Gunner, and K. Hintlian (eds.), *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London, 1995), pp. 35–46.

monasticism has its own physiognomy, which is reflected in the notable figures and the special ascetic literary works that flourished in these circles, particularly in the fifth and sixth centuries. Unlike Judean Desert monasticism, from which only hagiographic compositions have come down to us from the period under discussion, the monastic centre in Gaza left behind a broad and varied literary heritage that includes collections of letters, rules of monastic life, books of spiritual guidance, and hagiographic and historical texts. It is also possible that the collection of the sayings of the Desert Fathers (*Apophthegmata patrum*) was redacted in the Gaza region.⁹

Hilarion and the Beginnings of Gaza Monasticism

As is well known, there are two claimants to the title “founder of Palestinian monasticism”: Chariton and Hilarion. Anyone wishing to determine the beginnings of the monastic movement in Palestine must first assess the respective reliability and historicity of two hagiographic compositions describing the activities of these two monks. One is the *Life of Chariton*, written in the second half of the sixth century by a monk of Chariton’s monastery. Chariton, a native of Iconium in Asia Minor, came to the Judean Desert at the beginning of the fourth century and died in the *laura* at Faran in the middle of that century.¹⁰ The other composition is the *Life of Hilarion*,

⁹ The most comprehensive study of this problem is G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 1–25. Chitty was of the opinion that the *Apophthegmata* had been redacted outside Egypt—in his words, in the “diaspora”—after important figures had left Scetis during the fifth century. See Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 60–61, 66–71; D. J. Chitty, “The Books of the Old Men,” *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974), pp. 16–17. Lucien Regnault sought greater precision and determined that the alphabetic collection of the *Apophthegmata* was redacted in Palestine. L. Regnault, “Les Apophtegmes en Palestine aux V^e–VI^e siècles,” *Irénikon* 54 (1981), pp. 320–30; idem, *Les Pères du désert à travers leurs Apophtegmes* (Solesmes, 1987), pp. 73–83. This determination relies on the fact that a profound awareness of the *Apophthegmata* tradition is reflected in the monastic literature of Palestine, especially of Gaza, in the fifth and sixth centuries, and in the high frequency with which the sayings of Silvanus and his disciples, as well as of Abba Isaiah, appear in the *Apophthegmata*. For additional evidence, see Perrone, “Monasticism in the Holy Land,” p. 49, n. 39.

¹⁰ *Vita Charitonis*, ed. G. Garitte, “La vie premetaphrastique de S. Chariton,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 21 (1941), pp. 16–46, Eng. trans. L. Di Segni, “The Life of Chariton,” in V. Wimbush (ed.), *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (Claremont, 1990), pp. 393–421. On the *laura* at Faran and on Chariton’s monastery, see Y. Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 21–24; idem, “The Monastery of Chariton: Survey and Excavations,” *Liber Annus* 50 (2000), pp. 315–62.

written by Jerome c. 390. Hilarion was born c. 291/2 in the village of Thabatha,¹¹ south of Gaza, and died in Cyprus in 371.¹² Jerome explicitly states that it was Hilarion who introduced monasticism to Palestine, and that prior to him no one knew of monks in Syria—that is, Palestine.¹³ Since it is not possible to resolve the question of the beginnings of monasticism in Palestine, we content ourselves here with the observation that whether or not Hilarion was the first of the Palestinian monks, he is certainly to be counted among the first notable figures in Gaza monasticism.¹⁴

Not only are the beginnings of monastic settlement in Palestine shrouded in fog, but the first stages of Gaza monasticism are also hidden from view. Due to the paucity of archeological findings, this study is based primarily on literary sources.¹⁵ Accordingly, with regard to the question of monasticism's beginnings in the Gaza region, we have little choice but to resort to Jerome's *Life of Hilarion*, in which he attempted to describe the first of the Palestinian monks to be active in the Gaza area. When he set out to write the *Life of Hilarion*, Jerome had at hand a Latin translation of the *Life of Antony*, a composition that had achieved wide distribution immediately upon its publication in 356. Jerome had been acquainted with this work for many years before he began to write the *Life of Hilarion*, apparently thanks to his friend Evagrius of Antioch, who had translated the *Life of Antony* into Latin as early as 375.¹⁶ The *Life of Antony* inspired Jerome and served him as a literary model with regard to both its content and the ecclesiastical function of the text. Hilarion's life and deeds are described in parallel to those of Antony, and the similarity of many details is obvious. Even the status of the heroes is identical:

¹¹ On the identification of Thabatha with Umm al-Tut, see Y. Tsafrir, L. Di Segni, and J. Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani: Iudaea, Palaestina. Eretz Israel in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Periods. Maps and Gazetteer* (Jerusalem, 1994), p. 246.

¹² *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. A. Bastiaensen, *Vita di Martino, Vita di Ilarione, In memoria di Paola* (Milan, 1975), pp. 69–143; 291–317.

¹³ *V. Hilar.* 14.

¹⁴ Perrone, "Monasticism in the Holy Land," pp. 33–34.

¹⁵ On the epigraphic findings from the Gaza area, see L. Di Segni, "Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods," (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 504–40. The epigraphic findings do not, however, include information on the monasticism of Gaza. See also Hirschfeld, "The Monasteries of Gaza: An Archaeological Survey."

¹⁶ See Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* 125, ed. E. C. Richardson, TU 14.1 (Leipzig, 1896), p. 53.

Antony and Hilarion are presented as founding fathers of monasticism, each in his location, as Jerome stated: The Lord Jesus had Antony the elder in Egypt and the younger Hilarion in Palestine.¹⁷ Like Antony, Hilarion achieved wide renown, his fame reaching Antony himself in his monastery in Egypt. And like Antony, Hilarion fled more than once from his admirers. The difference in certain biographical details—or, alternatively, the “deviation” of Jerome from his literary model—was intended, for the most part, to show that Hilarion was even greater than Antony. For example, Hilarion, sent by his parents to study in Alexandria, is more educated than Antony, who, according to his biographer, was unable to learn letters.¹⁸ With regard to his deeds as a holy man, too, Jerome presented Hilarion as superior to Antony, and the miracles he performed as more impressive. For instance, a woman who came to Hilarion from Egypt declared that Antony was watching there over her sick sons—could Hilarion save them? To some extent Hilarion is also described as Antony’s heir and as he who continues to save those who appeal to him after the death of Antony. Jerome has Hilarion, on one occasion, coming to the aid of residents of Egypt suffering from a severe drought; thus does the writer enlarge the geographic area of the saint’s activity and influence.¹⁹ Jerome was not the only one to imitate the *Life of Antony* in his hagiographic writing; this *vita* has served as a common literary pattern for the Christian world. However, unlike other writers, who were content with borrowing certain motifs or with copying the structure of the composition, Jerome also strives to prove that Hilarion was greater than Antony.²⁰

¹⁷ *V. Hilar.* 14.

¹⁸ *Vita Antonii* 1, ed. and trans. G. J. M. Bartelink, SC 400 (Paris, 1994). In contrast to the opinion that Antony was uneducated and illiterate, see S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, 1995); idem, “Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography,” in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000), pp. 110–39, esp. 110–19; P. Rousseau, “Jerome’s Search for Self-Identity,” in P. Allen, R. Canning, and L. Cross (eds.), *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, vol. 1 (Brisbane, 1998), pp. 125–142.

¹⁹ *V. Hilar.* 32.

²⁰ See, E. Coleiro, “Saint Jerome’s Lives of Hermits,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 11 (1957), pp. 161–78; A. A. R. Bastiaensen, “Jérôme hagiographe,” in G. Freyburger and L. Pernot (eds.), *Du héros païen au saint chrétien*, Collection des Etudes Augustiniennes 14 (Paris, 1997), p. 106; Rubenson, “Philosophy and Simplicity,” pp. 119–24.

The author's tendency to present Hilarion as the father of Palestinian monasticism and as a more powerful saint than Antony more than occasionally leads us to doubt the veracity of his information. There is no questioning the value of hagiographic works in understanding historical events and local realities,²¹ yet those of Jerome seem particularly problematic.²² They leave room to ponder the extent to which Jerome was held captive by the chains of the hagiographic genre, the degree to which, in the *Life of Hilarion*, his feelings of local patriotism were in conflict with his desire to write a historical work describing the beginnings of monasticism in Palestine. This work has challenged scholars for many years, and they have been divided on the question of the text's historical value. Opinions range from acceptance of the composition as a reliable historical document to rejection of it as a legendary hagiographic composition designed by Jerome to present the tradition of Palestinian monasticism, with Hilarion at its head, in opposition to Egyptian monasticism, whose hero was Antony, and even to compete with the literary work that served him as model.²³ One may wonder why Jerome chose to locate the beginnings of monasticism in Gaza. Were things actually that way, or was it his close relationship with Epiphanius, who was active in the south of Palestine, and Jerome's lukewarm—at times even dismal—relations with the Church of Jerusalem, that brought him to bestow the crown of nascent Palestinian monasticism on the Gaza region? We do not propose to proffer a reply to these questions, merely to hint at the difficulties encountered by anyone wishing to understand the birth of the monastic movement and its growth in this region. Nevertheless, in spite of the tendencies of the author and the limitations of the hagiographic literary genre, it appears there is indeed a kernel of historical truth in Jerome's composition. The attempt to reach the historical figure of the protagonist through the many layers of the *Life of Hilarion* encounters many difficulties; however, anyone

²¹ For a methodological discussion on the question of the historical value of hagiographic literature, see R. L. Fox, "The *Life of Daniel*," in M. J. Edwards and S. Swain (eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 175–225.

²² For an account of the research and a summary of different opinions regarding the nature of Jerome's hagiographic compositions, see Bastiaensen, "Jérôme hagiographe," pp. 97–123; J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975), pp. 172–74.

²³ Bastiaensen, "Jérôme hagiographe."

wishing to advocate the historicity of this composition is aided by the testimony of the church historian Sozomen of Bethlelea (see below).

Jerome, who came to Palestine in 386, did not know Hilarion, the latter having died in 370. Jerome thus began writing the biography twenty years after Hilarion's death and about four years after settling in Bethlehem. What were his sources? Jerome mentions a letter in praise of Hilarion, perhaps a sort of brief biography, written by his friend Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315–403), a native of Eleutheropolis, which, he says, achieved wide distribution.²⁴ Moreover, Jerome was influenced by classical Latin writers and poets, in whose work he was well versed. According to Bastiaensen, Jerome succeeded, by virtue of his literary talents, in arranging a hodge-podge of hagiographic and historical data, molding it through the magic of his style into a coherent and attractive literary work.²⁵

Jerome writes that Hilarion's parents were pagans, who had sent him in his youth to study in Alexandria. While there, he heard of Antony and set off to study with him. After a stay of about two months, Hilarion came to loathe the many visitors who swarmed to Antony's place of seclusion. According to Jerome, at this stage the decision was formed in his heart "to begin as Antony began"—that is, to live as a hermit; he therefore returned to Gaza, accompanied by a few monks. A description follows of his hermitage in a dangerous wilderness area near Maiuma. Hilarion wandered from place to place; he is described as a monk who developed for himself an anchoritic lifestyle. Like the monks of Egypt, Hilarion wove baskets, a common monastic occupation.²⁶ When he was sixteen years old, he retreated to a hut for four years; he then built himself a cell whose height was less than his own. The cell was so small, says Jerome, that it could have been mistaken for a tomb.²⁷ A similar motif is found in the *Life of Antony*, where it is related that Antony lived in a tomb on the outskirts of his village.²⁸ Like Antony, Hilarion remained a hermit in the desert for twenty-two years; but once dis-

²⁴ *V. Hilar.* 5,1. This letter has not come down to us.

²⁵ Bastiaensen, "Jérôme hagiographe," p. 114.

²⁶ *V. Hilar.* 2–5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ *V. Ant.* 8; cf. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* III, 14, ed. J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen, GCS 50 (Berlin, 1960).

covered, admirers from Syria and Egypt flocked to him.²⁹ Already in the days of Emperor Constantius (337–361) he had a monastery (*monasterium*) in the Gaza region,³⁰ and by the age of sixty-three he was the leader of a large monastery overflowing with visitors.³¹ In sum, from Jerome's *Life of Hilarion* it appears that Hilarion at first chose anchoritic seclusion and only at a later stage of his life founded a monastery.³² This mode of development of a monastic settlement prevailed in other centres as well. It is noteworthy that Jerome describes Hilarion as acting alone; disciples and members of his circle are almost entirely banished from the scene. This fact, too, betrays Jerome's goal: to write not a historical text about the development of the monastic movement in this region but, rather, a hagiographic composition focusing on the life and deeds of his hero, one who acts in a defined area and time, in a manner reminiscent of Antony. It can be said, then, that Jerome is faithful to the goal of his composition, although this goal appears to prevail over historical exactitude.

Due to his different origins and literary aims, Sozomen's brief historical sketch of Hilarion's life differs from that of Jerome. Salamanes Hermias Sozomen was born in about 380 in the pagan town of Bethlelea near Gaza,³³ his family's seat for several generations.³⁴ This was a respected pagan family, which, in the days of Sozomen's grandfather, was among the first families of the town to convert to Christianity—apparently around the year 330—under the influence of Hilarion's miraculous healing of a townsman by the name of Alaphion. Sozomen recounts that in his youth he often spent time in the company of a few elders of Alaphion's family, who were pious men. In his later years Sozomen lived in Constantinople and was active in one of the city's courts of law, apparently as an advocate. From his descriptions, he appears to have traveled throughout the empire and spent time in Rome, Alexandria, Palestine, and Syria.

²⁹ *V. Hilar.* 13; cf. *V. Ant.* 14.

³⁰ *V. Hilar.* 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³² Jerome consistently uses in the *vita* the term *monasterium*, though in fact it may have been no more than a modest hermitage.

³³ For the identification of Bethlelea with Beit Lahiya north of Gaza, see Tsafir et al., *Tabula Imperii Romani*, pp. 81–82.

³⁴ For the life of Sozomen, see the introduction in the French translation, *Sozomène, Histoire Ecclésiastique*, vols. 1–2, ed. and trans. B. Grillet and G. Sabbah, SC 306 (Paris, 1983), pp. 9–31.

Sozomen wrote his Church history in the 440s with the work of the Church historian Socrates before him as the basis for his own. Sozomen, however, sought out additional sources, questioned various people, and checked out the details recorded by Socrates. In comparison with his predecessor, his special interest in the history of Palestine is marked, and indeed he adds information not found in other compositions. There is no doubt that Sozomen's Palestinian origins and his particularly close acquaintance with the south of the country and with Palestinian local traditions contributed to his desire to include these matters in his composition, even when not required by the narrative.

Before turning to Sozomen's description of Gaza monasticism, we must consider that he alludes neither to the monasticism of the Judean Desert, which had already taken its first steps in his time, nor to the monastic centres in Jerusalem. From his description one gains the impression that the only existing monastic settlements in Palestine in the mid-fifth century were in the region of Gaza, and that the Judean Desert remained uninhabited by ascetics. However, from the literary sources and the rich archeological findings there, it is clear that this was not the case.³⁵ Although Sozomen's information on events in Palestine is fragmentary, it is unreasonable to suppose that he knew nothing about the monasticism of the Judean Desert or that of Jerusalem. This glossing over by the historian may be intentional, or it may stem from the author's general objective or even from the nature of the sources at his disposal. Sozomen, it is known, set himself the goal of writing a general history of the Church, not an account of the course of Christianity and monasticism in Palestine. Additional details about Hilarion were known to Sozomen by virtue of his origins in the area and from his own family history. It seems that when he began to describe Palestinian monasticism, the sources available to him were only those from the Gaza region, and he therefore placed that region at the centre of

³⁵ On Judean Desert monasticism, see Chitty, *The Desert a City*; Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*; idem, "List of the Byzantine Monasteries in the Judean Desert," in G. C. Bottini, L. Di Segni, and E. Alliata (eds.), *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land: New Discoveries. Essays in Honor of Virgilio C. Corbo*, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Maior 36 (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 1–89; Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*. For additional bibliography, see Perrone, "Monasticism in the Holy Land."

his description. Sozomen, in fact, relates information on the Gaza area not known to us from other sources.³⁶

Sozomen's brief biography of Hilarion appears in the third book of his *Ecclesiastical History*, as part of his general discussion of monasticism in the empire. He describes the central figures in Egyptian monasticism, such as Antony, Macarius, Pachomius, and others, and in this context he adds that at approximately the same time a similar philosophy—that is, the monastic way of life—was practiced in Palestine. From this point, he moves on to relate briefly the life of Hilarion, an account identical in its details to the description given in Jerome's *Life of Hilarion*.³⁷ Sozomen goes on to tell of the activities of the monk Julian Saba (d. 367) in Edessa, and this concludes his account of monasticism in the empire. It appears that for Sozomen, the core of Palestinian monasticism is that of Gaza, with Hilarion at its head. From Sozomen, in fact, we learn nothing more about Hilarion than we have learned from Jerome; only the context is different. It is not improbable, therefore, that Sozomen had before him the *Life of Hilarion* or some other, common source.

In the fifth book of Sozomen's history, he returns to Hilarion, this time in a description of the religious persecution in Gaza and its environs, and in this context he introduces new information.³⁸ He begins with a brief description of Hilarion's voyage to Sicily, from whence he was again compelled to flee after being identified by admirers.³⁹ The miracles he performed are then related, as are the religious persecutions from which he fled at the time of Julian. Further along Sozomen writes about his own grandfather and other families who converted to Christianity under the instruction of Hilarion, and the miracles he worked.⁴⁰

³⁶ See, for example, the information on religious persecution in Gaza, Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.*, V, 9–10.

³⁷ *Hist. Eccl.*, III, 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 10.

³⁹ On Hilarion's sojourn in Sicily, see G. Di Stefano, "Eremiten und Pilger zwischen Palästina und dem kaiserlichen Sizilien: Der Fall des heiligen Hilarion," in E. Dassmann and J. Engemann (eds.), *Akten des XII. Internationalen Kongresses für christliche Archäologie* (Münster, 1995), part 2, pp. 1219–21.

⁴⁰ *Hist. Eccl.*, V, 15. On the Christianization of the pagan population in the Gaza area, see above, note 2.

The Next Generation

In the sixth book of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Sozomen once again addresses the subject of Palestinian monasticism, and here again his description is fairly general and lacks any allusion to the ascetic communities of Jerusalem and the Judean Desert.⁴¹ He contents himself with the general observation that many monastic institutions existed in Palestine, and that many of those in existence in the time of Constantius continued to foster this way of life. Unlike Jerome, who sought to diminish the role of Hilarion's disciples, and possibly thanks to Sozomen's local sources, this account gives us important information on the followers of Hilarion. First he singles out two of the most outstanding from among Hilarion's circle—Hesychas and Epiphanius. Hesychas is the disciple and companion who settled in the same place as his teacher, Hilarion. Hesychas was also mentioned by Jerome; it is he who stole Hilarion's body from Cyprus, conveyed it to Palestine, and interred it in his own monastery at Maiuma.⁴² Epiphanius, at that time the head of the metropolitan church of Cyprus,⁴³ had been instructed from his youth by the most famous ascetics, and also spent long periods in Egypt. "Hence he is, I think, the most revered man under the whole heaven," says Sozomen.⁴⁴

In that same period, writes Sozomen, there were four brothers of a noble family in the monasteries near Bethlema—Salamines, Phuscon, Malachion, and Crispion—who were instructed in the monastic way of life by Hilarion. Later he mentions another monk—Ammonius, a native of Gaza—who lived near Capharcobra, a town of Gaza, at a distance of ten stadia from the brothers.⁴⁵ The chapter concludes with a brief description of Silvanus, another famous monk of the Gaza region. "I think that Silvanus, a native of Palestine, to whom, on account of his high virtue, an angel was once seen to minister, practiced philosophy about the same time in Egypt. He then lived at Mount Sinai and later founded, at Gerar in the wadi, a very extensive and most noted coenobium for many good men."⁴⁶

After the death of Silvanus, the monastery was headed by his dis-

⁴¹ *Hist. Eccl.*, VI, 32.

⁴² *V. Hilar.* 46; *Hist. Eccl.*, III, 14.

⁴³ *Hist. Eccl.*, VI, 32. Sozomen devotes a long discussion to the activities of Epiphanius in *ibid.*, VII, 27.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, VI, 32.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For the identification of Gerar with Tel Haror, see Tsafir et al., *Tabula Imperii*

ciple Zacharias. The question of the next generation is also presented by Sozomen in the general context of monasticism in the empire. First he writes of the monks of Nitria and Kellia, then of the disciples of Hilarion and Silvanus, concluding with stories about the monks of Syria.⁴⁷ Again, it is worth recalling that when Sozomen set out to describe Palestinian monasticism he had in mind Epiphanius and Hilarion and his followers in Gaza and its environs. In the seventh book Sozomen furnishes additional information about Gaza monasticism, relating to the brothers Zeno and Ajax, who lived in the days of Theodosius I (379–395) and were harshly treated by the pagans. Sozomen claims that the details about the two are the fruit of his own research. They chose the monastic life but, he emphasizes, choosing not to be hermits in the desert, they settled in Gaza. Ajax headed the church at Bitulion; Zeno the church at Maiuma. In personal testimony about Zeno, Sozomen relates that while serving as bishop of Maiuma, Zeno was never absent from prayer or the liturgy.⁴⁸

Sozomen's brief account is important because it is external to the *Apophthegmata*—one of the main sources of information about Silvanus; Michel Van Parys wonders why Sozomen particularly chose to describe Silvanus and his companions, since there were, after all, many other monks.⁴⁹ In this case, too, it may not have been a conscious choice or a filtering of the sources that determined Sozomen's account, but merely the coincidence of having local sources from the region of Gaza and Eleutheropolis available to him.

In the *Apophthegmata*, from which we learn about Silvanus and his spiritual leadership, several sayings are related in his name.⁵⁰ A spiritual father blessed with the gift of prophecy, Silvanus was born in Palestine and headed a community of twelve monks at Scetis.⁵¹ He

Romani, pp. 132–33, and see there also Gerarit. It seems that in Sozomen's time the monastery had already been transformed into a coenobium, but according to his own description it was originally a laura.

⁴⁷ *Hist. Eccl.*, VI, 32–34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, VII, 28.

⁴⁹ M. Van Parys, "Abba Silvain et ses disciples: Une famille monastique entre Scété et la Palestine à la fin du IV^e et dans la première moitié du V^e siècles," *Irénikon* 61 (1988), p. 322.

⁵⁰ PG 65, 408–14.

⁵¹ On Silvanus and his disciples and the sayings in his name in the various collections of the *Apophthegmata*, see the broad survey of Van Parys, "Abba Silvain," pp. 315–31.

guessed the questions of his disciples and knew their sins even before they confessed to him.⁵²

Silvanus was among those who left the Egyptian desert at the end of the fourth century.⁵³ In about 380 the community moved to Sinai and later to the Gaza region, where they settled near the Gerar River and established a monastery.⁵⁴ The overall impression that Silvanus' circle was educated is attested by the presence of Marcus the Calligrapher.⁵⁵ Zacharias, another disciple, discovered a book written in Hebrew.⁵⁶ Other disciples of Silvanus were Zeno,⁵⁷ eventually the spiritual director of Peter the Iberian, and Netras,⁵⁸ who was to become bishop of Paran.

In Gaza Silvanus and his followers led a life similar to that in Egypt: secluded in cells during the week, occupied with prayer and various forms of manual labor, and on Saturdays and Sundays gathering for communal prayers and meals.⁵⁹ It was the custom of Silvanus to visit the monks in their cells only on Saturdays and Sundays.⁶⁰

Silvanus died before 414, and his disciple Zacharias was appointed to lead the *laura*. It is he who was involved, according to Sozomen, in the discovery of the relics of the prophet Zechariah, son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:20–22), in Caphar Zacharia—a village in the territory of Eleutheropolis—and through the cult of these relics contact was made with the community of Melania the Younger in Jerusalem.⁶¹

Zeno

Silvanus' disciple Zeno, known as "the Prophet" (d. 451), played an important role in Palestinian monasticism in the fifth century. Our

⁵² *Apophthegmata* N 217, trans. L. Regnault, *Les sentences des pères du désert: nouveau recueil* (Solesmes, 1970).

⁵³ Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ *Hist. Eccl.*, VI, 8, 32. On early monastic settlements in Sinai, see Solzbacher, *Mönche, Pilger und Sarazenen*; Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai in the Byzantine Period*.

⁵⁵ *Apoph.* Marcus, PG 65, 293–96.

⁵⁶ *Hist. Eccl.*, IX, 17.

⁵⁷ *Apoph.* Zeno, PG 65, 175–78.

⁵⁸ *Apoph.* Netras, PG 65, 312.

⁵⁹ A description of Silvanus' way of life is found in the *Apophthegmata* N 408.

⁶⁰ John Rufus, *Plerophoriae*, ed. and trans. F. Nau, PO 8 (Paris, 1912), p. 178.

⁶¹ *Hist. Eccl.*, IX, 16–17.

knowledge of him, aside from the *Apophthegmata*, comes mostly from John Rufus, who devoted the eighth chapter of the *Plerophoriae* to him; and there is further information about him in Rufus' *Life of Peter the Iberian*.⁶² John Rufus describes Zeno as a prophet, a wondering monk (*metkarkana*), and a hermit,⁶³ as well as a father who received monks from various places and gave them spiritual guidance. In the *Apophthegmata*, too, he appears as an outstanding example of the eremitic ideal, one who preferred not to settle down in a permanent location.⁶⁴ From the *Apophthegmata* it appears that not a great deal is known of Zeno's early period at Scetis.⁶⁵ He visited Egypt and stayed with Silvanus in Sinai, however most of the information about him relates to Palestine in the first half of the fifth century. Some of the anecdotes about him were collected about thirty-five years after his death by the philosopher Aeneas of Gaza in his apologetic work *Theophrastus*.⁶⁶ The information we have attests to certain contacts between the monastic communities in the Gaza region and prominent members of the intelligentsia such as Aeneas. This, too, appears to have been a learned monastic circle.

Among the well-known monks who came to Zeno for spiritual guidance were Peter the Iberian and his companion, John, who customarily visited him at Caphar She'artha, southeast of Gaza,⁶⁷ apparently the location of the hermitage in which he was living at the time.⁶⁸ Zeno was seen by his generation as a spiritual teacher, and in addition to Peter and John, who came to seek his guidance, there is testimony that Egyptian monks sought him out and even asked him to interpret Job 15:15.⁶⁹ He also appears as the spiritual father of Stephen, a deacon in Jerusalem who left the city after the Council

⁶² The information about Zeno in *The Life of Peter the Iberian* (Syriac text and Ger. Trans., R. Raabe, *Petrus der Iberer: Ein Charakterbild zur Kirchen- und Sittengeschichte des fünften Jahrhunderts* [Leipzig, 1895], hereinafter *V. Petri Ib.*), and in the *Plerophoriae* is presented in Van Parys, "Abba Silvain," pp. 324–30, 452–80.

⁶³ *Plerophoriae* 8; Supplements to the *Plerophoriae*, p. 163.

⁶⁴ PG 65, 176b.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 65, 177ab.

⁶⁶ Text and Italian trans. M. E. Colonna (Naples, 1958).

⁶⁷ For the identification of this site, see Tsafirir et al., *Tabula Imperii Romani*, p. 165.

⁶⁸ *Plerophoriae*, 8; *Vita Petri Iberi* 49–50.

⁶⁹ PG 65, 176c–d. On Zeno as a spiritual father, see *Apophthegmata* N 509–10; N 570–71.

of Chalcedon.⁷⁰ Zeno habitually roamed among the various monastic centres. Testimony has been preserved on one of his visits to Jerusalem, where he prayed; from there he continued on to the monastery near the village of Emmaus (Nicopolis), where he worked miracles and gave spiritual guidance.⁷¹ He also traveled to Scetis, where he visited Abba Elpidius, who was of Palestinian origin.⁷² John Rufus attests that Zeno lived as a hermit for about a year before his death,⁷³ and it may be, as Van Parys believes, that withdrawal and utter seclusion before death was characteristic of monastic practice in the Gaza region. Other examples are Abba Isaiah and Barsanuphius.

Abba Isaiah

Abba Isaiah, who arrived in the region of Gaza in the second half of the fifth century, brought about a significant shift in Gaza monasticism, revolutionizing its patterns of leadership and affecting every aspects of its life. He is mentioned in various texts originating in the monastic circle of Gaza⁷⁴ and in a brief biography, preserved in its entirety only in Syriac translation and attributed to Zacharias the Rhetor (Zacharias Scholasticus), who was close to this circle in the next generation.⁷⁵ Abba Isaiah was an Egyptian monk who began his monastic life in a coenobium and thereafter secluded himself in the desert.⁷⁶ He drew many admirers, and in order to avoid them

⁷⁰ *Plerophoriae*, 136.

⁷¹ *Apophthegmata*, N 627b. Additional testimony on Zeno's relationship with Jerusalem monasticism is preserved in the Ethiopian *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah. See Van Parys, "Abba Silvain," p. 464.

⁷² *Apophthegmata*, N 627a.

⁷³ *Plerophoriae*, 21.

⁷⁴ For an analysis of the sources pertaining to Abba Isaiah, see D. J. Chitty, "Abba Isaiah," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), p. 50. For a general study of Abba Isaiah, see J. Vailhé, "Un mystique monophysite, le moine Isaïe," *Échos d'Orient* 9 (1906), pp. 81–91.

⁷⁵ *Vita Isaiae Monachi*, ed. E. W. Brooks, CSCO, Scriptorum Syri, ser. 3, xxv (1907), pp. 3–16. René Draguet cast doubt on the attribution of the *vita* to Zacharias; he questioned its authenticity and saw it as a late hagiographic text. However, his doubts were convincingly rejected by Regnault and Chitty. See R. Draguet, CSCO 293 (1968), "Introduction au problème isaïen," p. 107; L. Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza? Notes critiques en marge d'une Introduction au problème isaïen," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 46 (1970), pp. 33–44; Chitty, "Abba Isaiah," pp. 47, n. 1, 61–65.

⁷⁶ *V. Isa.* 4. Page numbers are those of the Syriac text in the Brooks edition, which includes a modern Latin translation of the text.

he decided to emigrate to Palestine. After a visit to Jerusalem and its holy places, he settled in the “desert” near Eleutheropolis, and there, too, became known.⁷⁷ Even members of the government took an interest in him.⁷⁸ Finally, Abba Isaiah withdrew to the Gaza region—apparently near Beth Dallatha, four miles from Thabatha, Hilarion’s birthplace and the place where Peter the Iberian resided in the years 485–488—in an effort to escape the hordes of admirers, both monks and laymen, who congregated at his door seeking assistance and spiritual direction.⁷⁹ There, apparently in the years after the Council of Chalcedon (451), he established a coenobium that incorporated forms of lauritic monasticism,⁸⁰ similar to the pattern initiated by Shenoute in Egypt and by Gerasimus, around the same time, in the Jordan Valley.⁸¹ Abba Isaiah withdrew to his cell in a life of retreat, maintaining contact with the outside world only through his disciple Peter the Egyptian. He made a single exception, on the occasion of a visit by a delegation of Egyptian monks headed by John the Archimandrite, when, in a spirit of egalitarianism, he opened his door to all.⁸² Even under conditions of extreme withdrawal, Abba Isaiah continued his spiritual direction through his disciple until the day of his death in August 491.⁸³ He thus forged a pattern of spiritual leadership that continued in the first half of the sixth century among the monastic circle of Gaza under Barsanuphius and John. Abba Isaiah had contact with the well-known

⁷⁷ *V. Isa.* 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁹ *V. Petri Ib.* 100–104. The geographic identification of Beth Dallatha is not clear, but see its proposed identification as south of Thabatha, *Tabula Imperii Romani*, p. 81.

⁸⁰ *Plerophoriae*, 48, in contrast to Draguet, who calls Abba Isaiah’s monastery a *laura* (Draguet, “Introduction,” pp. 103–93). See also Chitty, “Abba Isaiah,” p. 64, n. 1. John of Beth Rufina (John Rufus), the author of the *Plerophoriae* and *V. Petri Ib.*, tells of the relationship between himself and Isaiah from the time of his arrival in Palestine in 479 (*Plerophoriae* 22; *V. Petri Ib.* 81–82).

⁸¹ See R. Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2002), p. 14; S. Vaillhé, “Les laures de Saint Gerasime et de Calamon,” *Échos d’Orient* 2 (1898–9), pp. 106–119; Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p. 90; Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 12–13, 244.

⁸² *V. Isa.* 9–11. See also *V. Petri Ib.* 103; *Plerophoriae*, Addenda, pp. 164–65. Shenoute also led his coenobitic communities in seclusion, which he occasionally interrupted to visit his monasteries. See Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, p. 14.

⁸³ According to the dating of Paul Devos. See P. Devos, “Quand Pierre l’Ibère vint-il à Jérusalem?” *Analecta Bollandiana* 86 (1968), p. 350.

philosopher and rhetor Aeneas of Gaza, who frequently consulted him regarding the philosophical writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Plontius, even though Abba Isaiah had no philosophical training.⁸⁴ This relationship attests to contact with the intellectual centre that developed in Gaza in this period,⁸⁵ providing evidence of a certain intellectual openness in this circle. The extent of this openness is not to be exaggerated, however, since Abba Isaiah also evinced an anti-intellectual tendency.⁸⁶ This openness fluctuated in the generations that followed; it waxed with the addition of Peter the Iberian's disciples from among students of the Beirut law school, headed by Severus of Antioch, and waned with the anti-intellectual tendency reflected in the letters of Barsanuphius and John; but it was again resurgent in the generation after that: a change of direction toward more openness is once again discernible in the time of Dorotheus of Gaza.

From near and far, Abba Isaiah was assailed with questions relating to various aspects of life, especially religious and monastic life, and also theological problems.⁸⁷ The biography attributes to him many writings dealing with guidance for monks and monastic *politeia*,⁸⁸ clearly referring to the work *Asceticon*, which is ascribed to him.⁸⁹ In the years following the Council of Chalcedon, Abba Isaiah became one of the leaders of the anti-Chalcedonian opposition in Palestine, together with his friend Peter the Iberian.⁹⁰ Toward the close of

⁸⁴ *V. Isa.* 12.

⁸⁵ The "secular" centre of education in Gaza in the fifth and sixth centuries has been discussed at length. See G. Downey, "The Christian Schools of Palestine: A Chapter of Literary History," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 12 (1958), pp. 297–319; Y. Ashkenazi, "Paganism in Gaza in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries C.E.," *Cathedra* 60 (1991), pp. 106–15 (in Hebrew) and additional bibliography there.

⁸⁶ *Asceticon* 6.1, ed. Augoustinos Monachos (Jerusalem, 1911, 2nd ed., S. N. Schoinas, [Volos, 1962]). Notation of passages is according to the enlarged French edition: L. Regnault and H. de Broc, *Abbé Isaïe: Recueil ascétique* (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1985³).

⁸⁷ *V. Isa.* 10–11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁹ Draguet contested the accepted attribution of the *Asceticon* to Abba Isaiah; he attempted to attribute most of the text to another, earlier, Isaiah, who is mentioned in the *Apophthegmata*. This is, in fact, the central claim of his study (Draguet, "Introduction au problème isaïen"); however, his claims have been refuted by Regnault and Chitty. See Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza?"; Chitty, "Abba Isaiah." Even earlier, Herman Keller noted the underlying Monophysitism in the *Asceticon*, supporting the attribution of the text to Abba Isaiah. See H. Keller, "L'abbé Isaïe-le-Jeune," *Irénikon* 16 (1939), pp. 113–26.

⁹⁰ *V. Isa.* 11. It appears that extremist anti-Chalcedonian leaders from Egypt also

Abba Isaiah's life the two were called to Constantinople by the emperor Zeno (488), apparently to try to convince them to support the conciliatory policy of the *henotikon*; but Isaiah avoided making the voyage on the pretext of illness, while Peter escaped and hid in Phoenicia.⁹¹ Abba Isaiah died in his monastery in the summer of 491, leaving his disciple Peter the Egyptian as his heir.⁹²

Originally written in Greek, Abba Isaiah's *Asceticon*, was not long after translated into other languages.⁹³ The text is a collection of short essays (*logoi*) similar in their form and content to some of the letters of Barsanuphius and John, and echoing the style of the *Apophthegmata* rather than that of Dorotheus' *Instructions*. Many of these *logoi* seem to be based on Abba Isaiah's letters of spiritual guidance. Written without the intention of producing a literary work, they were later redacted by Peter the Egyptian and perhaps also by Peter's own disciples.⁹⁴ The text shares central themes with Egyptian monastic literature, such as the *Apophthegmata*, the letters of Antony, the writings of Evagrius, and the Pachomian corpus, as might be expected from Abba Isaiah's Egyptian ascetic roots. The *Asceticon* is not a systematic text, it merely transmits monastic teachings and the accumulated experience of previous generations. Compared to the *Apophthegmata*, it is notable for its didactic and pedagogic character. Essentially, it constitutes a manual of instruction, opinions, and advice, along with ascetic commentary on selected passages and concepts from the Holy Scriptures covering most of the situations in monastic life

consulted frequently with Isaiah and Peter the Iberian. See Zacharias the Rhetor (Scholasticus), *Ecclesiastical History* 5,9; 6,1, ed. E. W. Brooks, CSCO 83 (1919); *V. Sever.* 8, ed. M. A. Kugener, PO 2,1 (1903). Severus himself speaks of Abba Isaiah as one of three spiritual leaders—Peter the Iberian, Theodore of Antioch in Egypt, and Abba Isaiah—who at that time stood against Chalcedon. Severus, *Letter* 38, PO 12,2.

⁹¹ *V. Isa.* 14–15.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 15; *V. Petri Ib.* 125.

⁹³ For various versions of the Syriac text, see R. Draguet, *Les cinq recensions de l'Asceticon syriaque d'abba Isaïe I–IV*, CSCO 289–90; 293–94 (1968). See also J. Gribomont, "Le vieux corpus monastique du Vatican Syr. 123," *Le Muséon* 100 (1987), pp. 135–38. For the Coptic fragments, see A. Guillaumont, *L'Asceticon copte de l'abbé Isaïe* (Cairo, 1956); Y. N. Youssef, "Un complément de l'Asceticon copte de l'abbé Isaïe," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 (2001), pp. 187–90. An enlarged French translation of the text was published, as noted, by Regnault and De Broc.

⁹⁴ Regnault, *Abbé Isaïe, Recueil ascétique*, "Introduction," pp. 16–17; *idem*, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza?" p. 40. Indications of the possible epistolary origin of the work may be found in *Asceticon* 4, 5.48, 16.1, 20.1, 25.1. For an example of oral teaching to his disciple Peter, see *ibid.*, 26.11.

and specifying in concrete detail the prime duties of the semi-anchoretic monk. It thus differs from the predominantly eremitic reality of the *Apophthegmata* and Evagrius, and deals with a more complex coenobitic-eremitic situation. This precludes application of the Evagrian psychological dichotomy between the monk's eremitic life and his previous life in society, requiring a different and innovative treatment of the complex of challenges and problems arising from the monastic setting.⁹⁵

Peter the Iberian and his disciples

Peter was an Iberian (Georgian) prince raised in Constantinople as a political hostage in the court of Theodosius II, under the care of the emperor and his wife, Eudocia.⁹⁶ While still young he developed ascetic tendencies and together with his friend John the Eunuch, fled the capital and made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁹⁷ In Jerusalem the pair were admitted by Melania the Younger to her monastery for men under Gerontius on the Mount of Olives.⁹⁸

The relationship of Peter the Iberian and John the Eunuch with the monastic circle at Gaza was formed in the wake of their having become acquainted with the monk Zeno in Jerusalem. Zeno apparently used to sojourn in Jerusalem from time to time, and he became the spiritual guide of the two after they left Melania's monastery. They founded a monastery in Jerusalem near the Tower of David that served in part as a pilgrim's hostel. Becoming involved in public activity related to pilgrimage somewhat distanced them from the ideals of ascetic life.⁹⁹ Under Zeno's influence, however,

⁹⁵ On Abba Isaiah's spiritual guidance, see J. Chryssaugis, "Abba Isaiah of Scetis: Aspects of Spiritual Direction," *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001), pp. 30–40.

⁹⁶ *V. Petri Ib.* 15–16.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–18, 20–26.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30–32. Melania the Younger was close to the ruling circles in Constantinople and had met Peter previously, when she played a role in the betrothal of Princess Eudoxia, the daughter of Theodosius II and Eudocia, to the emperor Valentinian III. On Melania the Younger, see Gerontius, *The Life of Melania the Younger*, ed. D. Gorce, SC 90 (Paris, 1962); Eng. trans. E. A. Clark (New York, 1984). On her visit to Constantinople, see *ibid.*, 53–56. Thus a natural relationship was formed at the beginning of his monastic career in Palestine, between Peter, the royal pilgrim, and Melania and the aristocratic monastic centre on the Mount of Olives. For a biographical survey of the early life of Peter and his initial period in Palestine, see chap. 2, below; Horn, "Beyond Theology: The Career of Peter the Iberian," pp. 51–65.

⁹⁹ *V. Petri Ib.* 44–46.

they joined one of the communal monasteries in the city, resumed the life of monastic discipline, and later returned to their own monastery.¹⁰⁰ When Eudocia, Peter's guardian in Constantinople, settled in Jerusalem (c. 441/442),¹⁰¹ their relationship was renewed. Upon the attempts by Juvenal, bishop of Jerusalem, to have Peter ordained to the priesthood,¹⁰² Peter and John left Jerusalem, on Zeno's advice, and joined a small monastery near Maiuma, headed by Irenion,¹⁰³ where they retreated to a common monastic cell.¹⁰⁴ During this period they maintained a close relationship with Zeno in his monastery at Caphar She'artha.¹⁰⁵ At this time Peter was ordained to the priesthood under compulsion by Paul, bishop of Maiuma, the nephew of Juvenal and apparently in league with him, although Peter, until the Council of Chalcedon, managed to avoid serving as a priest and continue his life as a hermit.¹⁰⁶ Peter's aristocratic origins and his renown as a monk led to his active involvement in the anti-Chalcedonian rebellion that broke out in Palestine following the Council of Chalcedon, and he was appointed bishop of Maiuma by the rebel patriarch Theodosius.¹⁰⁷ Peter the Iberian thus became a central figure in the Christian and monastic circles of the Gaza area. However, following the suppression of the anti-Chalcedonian rebellion and the return of Juvenal to his see in Jerusalem, the leaders of the rebellion were persecuted and the anti-Chalcedonian bishops appointed during that time, including Peter, were removed from office.¹⁰⁸ During his exile in Egypt, which lasted a considerable number of years,¹⁰⁹ Peter led a semi-underground life

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 47–48.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 49. See also C. Horn, "Empress Eudocia and the Monk Peter the Iberian."

¹⁰² *V. Petri Ib.*, 50; *Plerophoriae*, 42.

¹⁰³ *V. Petri Ib.* 51.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁶ *V. Petri Ib.* 51.

¹⁰⁷ *Plerophoriae*, 56; *V. Petri Ib.* 52–54.

¹⁰⁸ *V. Petri Ib.* 57; Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3,5; John Rufus, *De Obitu Theodosii* 21, ed. E. W. Brooks, CSCO Scrip. Syri ser. 3, t. 25 (1907); John of Beth Aphthonia, *V. Severi*, 222, ed. M. A. Kugener, PO 2,3 (1904), pp. 219–23. On the anti-Chalcedonian rebellion in Palestine, see E. Honigsmann, "Juvenal of Jerusalem," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950), pp. 247–57; Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 89–91; Perrone, *La Chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 149–53; F. Winkelmann, "Konzeptionen des Verhältnisses von Kirche und Staat im frühen Byzanz, untersucht am Beispiel der Apostasia Palästinas (452–453)," in V. Vavrinek (ed.), *From Late Antiquity to Byzantium* (Prague, 1985), pp. 73–85.

¹⁰⁹ Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3,7; *V. Petri Ib.* 58.

and took an active part in anti-Chalcedonian activities in Egypt following the Council of Chalcedon.¹¹⁰

Peter returned to Palestine, choosing to dwell in the village of Peleia, near Ascalon,¹¹¹ and a core of militant anti-Chalcedonian resistance was forming around him in the southern coastal area. From his biography it appears that Peter during this period did not remain in Peleia but continued his travels, sojourning for fairly long periods in various locales in the southern coastal region. He was at Migdal Thabatha, Hilarion's birthplace and the site of his hermitage, for three years;¹¹² and he stayed for some time in a shack on the seashore near Azotus.¹¹³ Toward the end of his days he lived in the coastal suburb of Jamnia, on an estate that had formerly belonged to the Empress Eudocia and was managed by the Tribune Elias of Jerusalem, a follower of Peter who had previously been in the service of Eudocia.¹¹⁴ Despite the pleas of his disciples, Peter refused to return and spend his last days at his old monastery near Maiuma.¹¹⁵

It appears, then, that Peter's life after his return to Palestine was characterized by a markedly peripatetic form of monasticism. Despite long periods of routine, however, Peter continued to combine a life of retreat with a public and somewhat vagabond monasticism. It may be that the form of monastic life chosen by Peter was the result of a premeditated decision. This, in any case, is the claim of John Rufus, his companion and the author of Peter's *vita*,¹¹⁶ which

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 60–71.

¹¹¹ *V. Petri Ib.* 77. The town is not identified. See Tsafirir et al., *Tabula Imperii Romani*, p. 200. See, however, the suggestion of C. Clermont-Ganneau, "Sur quelques localités de Palestine mentionnées dans la *Vie de Pierre l'Ibère*," *Etudes d'archéologie orientale* 3 (1897), pp. 2–3.

¹¹² *V. Petri Ib.*, 101.

¹¹³ Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 122–23.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 122.

¹¹⁶ On John Rufus and his identification as the author of the anonymous biography of Peter the Iberian, see E. Schwartz, *Johannes Rufus: ein monophysitischer Schriftsteller*, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 3.16 (Heidelberg, 1912); Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*. On Rufus and the anti-Chalcedonian Palestinian hagiography, see B. Flusin, "L'hagiographie palestinienne et la réception du concile de Chalcédoine," in J. O. Rosenqvist (ed.), *AEIΩN: Studies Presented to Lennart Rydén on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Uppsala, 1996), pp. 25–47, esp. pp. 30–38. Zacharias Rhetor mentions that he also wrote a *vita* of Peter (*V. Severi* 83), which was lost except for a single Syriac fragment of its last lines. For this fragment, see E. W. Brooks (ed.), *CSCO* 7 Script. Syri ser. 3, t. 25 (1907), p. 18. D. M. Lang suggested a connection between the late Georgian *vita* of Peter with the lost one of Zacharias.

presents him in the last years of his life as a holy man who fulfilled the monastic ideal of *xeniteia* (Syriac *aksenaiutha*) in the broadest sense.¹¹⁷ According to Rufus, it was in light of this ideal that Peter refused to return to his old monastery between Gaza and Maiuma to spend his last days in tranquillity.¹¹⁸

During his sojourn at Migdal Thabatha, a close friendship formed between Peter and Abba Isaiah, and the two would meet periodically.¹¹⁹ Peter would, daily, send to Abba Isaiah a loaf of bread baked in Gaza of fine wheatflour, with parsley, leeks, and two small fishes, and Abba Isaiah would send him three small loaves in return.¹²⁰

From the biography—written at the end of the fifth century or beginning of the sixth—and from Rufus' Monophysite promotional work *Plerophoriae* (written most likely between 512 and 518), we learn incidentally about the existence of various anti-Chalcedonian monasteries in the area: Maiuma, Caphar She'artha, Migdal Thabatha, Kanopis,¹²¹ Beth Dallatha,¹²² Silvanus' monastery in Gerar, and Peleia near Ascalon;¹²³ also about a pair of monasteries, for men and women,

See D. M. Lang, "Peter the Iberian and His Biographers," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 2 (1951), pp. 158–68. Opposing this identification, see P. Devos, "On D. M. Lang, 'Peter the Iberian and His Biographers,' excerpt from the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, t. II (1951), pp. 158–168," *Analecta Bollandiana* 70 (1952), pp. 385–88. On the Georgian *vita* of Peter, see also A. B. Schmidt, "Habent sua fata libelli. Georgische Fiktion contra armenische Fälschung: Die Vita Petrus des Iberers im Spannungsfeld zwischen armenischer und gerogischer Überlieferung," in *Georgien im Spiegel seiner Kultur und Geschichte: Zweites Deutsch-Georgisches Symposium Vortragstexte* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 91–95. A brief biographical description of Peter is also given by John of Beth Aptonia in his *V. Severi*, 219–23.

¹¹⁷ On the monastic ideal of *xeniteia* and its various conceptions in Syrian and Egyptian monasticism, see Guillaumont, "Le dépaysement comme forme d'ascèse dans le monachisme ancien," in idem, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien: Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme*, *Spiritualité Orientale* 30 (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979), pp. 89–116.

¹¹⁸ *V. Petri Ib.* 22.

¹¹⁹ *Plerophoriae*, 12.

¹²⁰ *V. Petri Ib.* 101–103.

¹²¹ A village about two miles south of Gaza (which does not appear in Tsafir et al., *Tabula Imperii Romani*), the seat of the monk Abba John the Deacon, one of the heirs of Peter in the leadership of his old monastery near Maiuma. Previously, John had been the disciple of Stephen, who served as archdeacon in Jerusalem until the Council of Chalcedon. The two left Jerusalem following the suppression of the Monophysite rebellion and joined the circle of anti-Chalcedonian monks in the Gaza area (*V. Petri Ib.* 132–33). Stephen the Archdeacon is also mentioned in *Plerophoriae*, 8, 79.

¹²² *V. Petri Ib.* 102.

¹²³ From Rufus one can conclude that there was also wide support for Monophysitism in Ascalon itself (*Plerophoriae*, 52), as also among the residents of Gaza and Maiuma (*V. Petri Ib.* 142–43).

in the village of Aphthoria, south of Caesarea.¹²⁴ The members of Silvanus' monastery were Monophysites, while the majority of those of the neighboring Caphar Aphtha were Chalcedonians.¹²⁵ A similar case was the monastery of Claudianus near Acre and its neighboring village.¹²⁶ From Rufus one can conclude that there was also wide support for Monophysitism in Ascalon itself, as also among the residents of Gaza and Maiuma.¹²⁷ A picture emerges of a fairly extensive network of anti-Chalcedonian monasteries, extending northward toward Caesarea from the region to the south and east of Gaza, including the enclave of the Eleutheropolis area, which apparently constituted the geographic base for the anti-Chalcedonian resistance in Palestine.

Peter maintained a relationship with Timothy, the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria, in whose ordination he had participated when in Egypt; Timothy even invited Peter to join him in Alexandria, but Peter declined.¹²⁸ Peter's status won the recognition of the emperor Zeno (474–475, 476–491), who summoned Peter and Abba Isaiah to Constantinople. But Peter evaded Zeno's order and fled to Phoenicia.¹²⁹

One of the first to join Peter as a disciple upon his return from exile in Egypt was Theodore of Ascalon, a graduate of the exclusive law school in Beirut (Berytus), where he was a fellow student of John Rufus.¹³⁰ Theodore became one of Peter's close companions and abandoned his profession to become a monk. Eventually, after the death of Peter, he became one of the leaders of Peter's old monastery near Maiuma.¹³¹ In fact it was Theodore who had brought John Rufus and Peter into contact.¹³² Rufus, too, became one of

¹²⁴ *V. Petri Ib.* 129; *Plerophoriae*, 71; Severus of Antioch, *The Sixth Book of Letters* I.42, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks (Oxford, 1902–1903), p. 132. The village does not appear in the *Tabula Imperii Romani*; for various possible identifications, see Rosen, "A Converted Jewess from Tyre," pp. 64–66.

¹²⁵ *Plerophoriae*, 48.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 52; *V. Petri Ib.* 142–43.

¹²⁸ *V. Petri Ib.* 80.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 103–4; Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Isa.* 14. In Honigmann's opinion, Peter did not flee at all but was in fact on his way to Constantinople when notice of the cancellation of the summons reached him in Tripoli. See E. Honigmann, *Pierre l'Ibérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite* (Brussels, 1952), p. 13.

¹³⁰ *V. Petri Ib.*, 78; Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* I.35, p. 115.

¹³¹ *V. Petri Ib.*, 133, 144.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 78.

Peter's intimate followers, and his biography of his master is, therefore, firsthand evidence of the last twelve years of the life of Peter the Iberian.¹³³ Initial contact with graduates of the law school in Beirut—among them being some who had known Peter even earlier in Alexandria or Palestine or who had at least heard of him¹³⁴—led to Peter's great success in a circle of Beirut law students in Phoenicia. Among this group were Evagrius, the younger brother of Rufus, who stood out among his companions for his work in fostering the values of religion and monasticism;¹³⁵ Zacharias of Maiuma, later known as the historian Zacharias Rhetor;¹³⁶ and Severus of Sozopolis (in Pisidia), who would become one of the great leaders and theologians of Monophysite Christianity and the patriarch of Antioch (512–518) in the days of the pro-Monophysite emperor Anastasius (491–518).¹³⁷

John Rufus portrays Peter as a determined, uncompromising fighter for the Monophysite faith. Zacharias Rhetor, on the other hand, presents Peter as a moderate Monophysite, at least with regard to his theological beliefs.¹³⁸ Ernst Honigmann seeks to identify Peter the Iberian as the author of the corpus of pseudo-Dionysian writings, among the classical texts of Christian mysticism, since the first citations from these writings derived from the circle of Severus' supporters in the years after his death. Since only a moderate Monophysite position, at best, can be discerned in these writings, Honigmann

¹³³ Before joining Peter's circle, Rufus had served as a priest under Peter the Fuller, the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch. Upon the second removal from office of Peter the Fuller and his replacement by the Chalcedonian Calandion, Rufus joined Peter the Iberian in 479 (*V. Petri Ib.* 81–82; *Plerophoriae*, 22; Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Severi*, 86–87).

¹³⁴ *V. Petri Ib.* 114.

¹³⁵ See Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Severi*, 79–83.

¹³⁶ Zacharias also knew Abba Isaiah and saw him a number of times before returning home from his studies in Beirut (*Plerophoriae*, 73); he dedicated a brief biography to Abba Isaiah, as well as an additional biography, which has been lost, to his master, Peter.

¹³⁷ Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Severi*, 46–85; Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 104–5. Zacharias and Severus were friends from the time of their earlier studies in Alexandria. Zacharias' biography of his friend (*V. Severi*) contains rich information on the student life of Alexandria and Beirut of the period. On the cultural life of these circles, see W. Bauer, "Die Severus-Vita des Zacharias Rhetor," in idem, *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften* (Tübingen, 1967), pp. 210–18. On Zacharias Rhetor, see also E. Honigmann, "Zacharias of Mitylene (536 A.D.)," in idem, *Patristic Studies, Studi e Testi* 173 (Vatican, 1953), pp. 194–204; Flusin, "L'hagiographie palestinienne," pp. 30–38.

¹³⁸ This tendency is expressed in the description of Peter's stand on the question of the essence of the body of Christ (Zacharias Rhetor., *V. Isa.* 11).

wrestles with the radical image of Peter the Iberian presented by John Rufus and attempts to depict him as a moderate Monophysite leader and mystic who could be seen as most likely to be the author of these writings.¹³⁹ On the whole, the hagiographic *Life of Peter* presents Peter the Iberian as the model of the anti-Chalcedonian saint, and the same propagandist tendency stands behind it as that which characterizes the other works of John Rufus, the *Plerophoriae*¹⁴⁰ and *On the Death of Theodosius* (the rebel patriarch), written in the days when the anti-Chalcedonians had won a short period of grace under the emperor Anastasius (491–518).

Peter died in 491, having passed the age of seventy, surrounded by his disciples in the coastal suburb of Jamnia.¹⁴¹ On the eve of his death, he appointed four of his disciples, among them Theodore of Ascalon, as his heirs in the leadership of his old monastery near Maiuma. Moreover, he wished them to follow his example and exert their influence on his adherents outside the monastery.¹⁴² He summoned his disciples and presented to them his spiritual testament: devotion to the Monophysite faith and denial of the Council of Chalcedon, the holiness of body and spirit, love of the other and solidarity, avoidance of unnecessary conversation that arouses passions, meditation and continuous reading of Basil's ascetic writings, and a monastic life led according to Basil's teachings and rule, since his book was written by the inspiration of divine grace and the Holy Spirit.¹⁴³ There is clear evidence here of the penetration of the Basilian ideal of monasticism into the monastic circle of Gaza, which had hitherto been under the dominant influence of Egyptian monasticism.

¹³⁹ See Honigmann, *Pierre l'Ibérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite*. This suggestion has been refuted by various scholars. See I. Hausherr, "Le Pseudo-Denys est-il Pierre l'Ibérien?" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 19 (1953), pp. 247–60; H. Engberding, "Kann Petrus der Iberer mit Dionysius Areopagita identifiziert werden?" *Oriens Christianus* 38 (1954), pp. 68–95; R. Roques, "Pierre l'Ibérien et le 'Corpus dionysien'," *Revue d'histoire des religions* 145 (1954), pp. 69–98. M. van Esbroeck undertook a renewed discussion of Honigmann's proposal in "Peter the Iberian and Dionysius the Areopagite: Honigmann's Thesis Revisited," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 59 (1993), pp. 217–27.

¹⁴⁰ On the marked propagandist use of stories of visions and miracles for the purpose of doctrinal debate in this text, see L. Perrone, "Dissenso dottrinale e propaganda visionaria: le *Pleroforie* di Giovanni di Maiuma," *Augustinianum* 29 (1989), pp. 451–95.

¹⁴¹ *V. Petri Ib.* 137. On the question of the chronology of his life, see Devos, "Pierre l'Ibère."

¹⁴² *V. Petri Ib.* 132–34.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 134–35.

This trend would be strengthened in coming generations, especially in the time of Dorotheus in the second half of the sixth century.

On the morning following his death, Mass was celebrated in the presence of Peter's body, and postulants received the monastic robe from the hands of the deceased.¹⁴⁴ Peter's heirs hastened to bury him in the old monastery near Maiuma, for fear that the people of Maiuma and Gaza would try to steal the body and inter it in one of their churches—a not uncommon phenomenon following the death of a saint—a fear that was later realized. Peter's disciples and local Samaritan residents accompanied the coffin for quite a distance on its way to Maiuma.¹⁴⁵ His body was laid in a sarcophagus alongside that of his friend John the Eunuch.

After Peter's death, the modest *laura* was expanded and rebuilt as a *coenobium*, under the leadership of Theodore of Ascalon, to accommodate the many disciples of Peter who chose to join the monastery. A detailed description of the construction of a typical *coenobium* is preserved in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*: "First, he built the tower, and the church within it, and a chapel in the church. He built the wall of the monastery all round: and he established many cells, both lower and upper, and porticoes and pillars. He built a wall around the courtyard and dug a well and planted a garden. He looked after the rest of the needs and the building of the monastery and the manual labor of the brethren."¹⁴⁶ At the conclusion of the construction and cleaning, on the eve of the anniversary of Peter's death, his relics were translated and re-interred under the altar of the church that had been built in the monastery.¹⁴⁷ In his monastery and among his disciples a cult of his memory developed, which included memorial days and a continuation of his customs.¹⁴⁸ The conversion of the *laura* into a *coenobium* can in itself be interpreted as fulfillment of Peter's testament to cling to the Basilian communal monastic values. A similar instruction to change his *laura* to a *coenobium* is found in the testament of Euthymius a few years earlier (473).¹⁴⁹ This conversion of Peter's *laura* probably reflects a trend in

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 138.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 137–38.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 144.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 144–45.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 145–46, 132.

¹⁴⁹ Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Euthymii*, 39, ed. E. Schwartz (Leipzig, 1939), pp. 58–59.

the Gaza area of shifting from anchoritic to semi-anchoritic monasticism, after the fashion of Abba Isaiah's monastery, a trend that continued under the leadership of Barsanuphius, John, and Seridus.

For the next generation a political climate favorable to the anti-Chalcedonians existed under the rule of the emperor Anastasius. As far as historical sources enable us to determine, the leadership passed into the hands of those of Peter's disciples who had been members of the Beirut circle. Some had joined Peter prior to his death.¹⁵⁰ Rufus' brother, Evagrius, and several other members of the group, among them Zacharias, came to the monastery near Maiuma in the wake of Peter's death. Zacharias himself flinched at first from adopting the monastic life, and Severus even encouraged him not to join the other members of the group. Indeed, after a relatively short period, Zacharias returned to Beirut to complete his studies.¹⁵¹ He later returned to Gaza, but following his dispatch to Constantinople on his father's business, he eventually remained in the empire's capital and forged a legal career.¹⁵² It is thought that Zacharias may have ended his life as bishop of Mytilene, and perhaps even as a supporter of the Chalcedonian camp.¹⁵³ Zacharias' contacts with the scholar Aeneas of Gaza tell us of the continued close relations between the monastic educated circle of Gaza and the literary circle that was concentrated around the institute of higher education in the city.¹⁵⁴

Zacharias, as noted earlier, wrote a biography of Severus, a brief biography of Abba Isaiah, and four of the twelve books of ecclesiastical history published in his name¹⁵⁵—all of which have come down to us in Syriac translation¹⁵⁶—as well as a biography of Peter the Iberian that is no longer extant. The works of Zacharias Rhetor and of John Rufus provide much that is firsthand evidence of iden-

¹⁵⁰ V. Severi, 83–86, 95.

¹⁵¹ V. Severi, 88–89.

¹⁵² V. Severi, 95.

¹⁵³ Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p. 105 and note 61.

¹⁵⁴ V. Severi, 90.

¹⁵⁵ An English translation of the text was published by F. J. Hamilton and E. W. Brooks, *The Syriac Chronicle Known as That of Zacharia of Mitylene* (London, 1899). The historical work survives only in a Syriac abridgement that is integrated into an anonymous chronicle from the second half of the sixth century. Only books 3–6 were written by Zacharias. See Honigmann, "Zacharias of Mitylene"; P. Allen "Zachariah Scholasticus and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Evagrius Scholasticus," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 31 (1980), pp. 471–88.

¹⁵⁶ On the disappearance of the Monophysite hagiographic texts in Greek, see Flusin, "L'hagiographie palestinienne," pp. 38–44.

tical events, and they therefore supplement and corroborate each other.

Severus himself, although he led an ascetic life while a student,¹⁵⁷ did not consider joining his friends in Peter's monastery and planned to return home to work in his profession. Before doing that, however, he decided to undertake a pilgrimage to the holy places. Leaving his belongings and servants with Zacharias, he left for Jerusalem, accompanied by just one old servant. From Jerusalem he continued on to Peter's monastery. His visit with his old friends and others who were continuing the ways of Peter the Iberian, and this direct experience of monastic life, led him to send his servant back to Beirut and to ask Zacharias to order the others to return with his belongings to his home in Sozopolis, while he stayed on as a monk at Maiuma.¹⁵⁸

Zacharias provides a rare, albeit somewhat stereotypical, description of life in the monastery near Maiuma: the monks spent all their time fasting, standing throughout the day, holding vigils throughout the night, and praying ceaselessly, in private and public prayer. They slept on the ground and devoted a small part of each day to manual labor, through which they met all their corporal needs. They also helped the needy. They occupied themselves with reading and with meditating on the Holy Scriptures even while working. Their humility was so great that they avoided looking one another in the face, keeping their gaze on the ground when addressing one another. They excelled in zealously fostering the virtues of asceticism, and avoided any unnecessary speech. Zacharias tells of several monks who had been ordered by Peter during his lifetime to maintain utter silence in their contact with their fellows for ten years or more, and these conversed only with God in their prayers. According to Zacharias, Peter forbade them to speak so that they would not disclose to anyone except God their struggle against the demonic thoughts that frequently assailed them, that they might merit the necessary cure. So strict was their obedience that they not only avoided any unnecessary speech but were even careful not to disclose their troublesome thoughts through their appearance, their gait, or the look in their eyes.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ *V. Severi*, 82.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 91–93.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 93–94.

After having spent some time in the coenobium, Severus decided to live as a hermit monk with his friend Anastasius in the area of Eleutheropolis. But this eremitic retreat did not last long; their severely ascetic lifestyle so weakened them that they were brought to the nearby monastery of Romanus by its abbot, Eupraxius, who had visited them.¹⁶⁰ After a period of recovery, Severus returned to his eremitic life in the *laura* of Maiuma, near Peter's monastery, under the spiritual direction of Theodore and John, Peter's heirs.¹⁶¹ Following a long period of hermitage in these two monasteries, a number of monks asked to live under the direction of Severus. Having sought the counsel of the monastery's leaders, who gave their approval, Severus, with money remaining from his inheritance, purchased a monastery in the area, reorganized it, and built new cells.¹⁶² His first and most outstanding disciple was Peter, a law student from Beirut and native of Caesarea in Palestine.¹⁶³ Severus' new status was recognized, and he was ordained to the priesthood by Epiphanius bishop of Magydos in Pamphylia, who was later buried in Severus' monastery.¹⁶⁴

During this period, Severus became a leading figure of anti-Chalcedonian monasticism in Gaza and the southern coastal region.¹⁶⁵ His status was notable in the wake of the tensions between the Chalcedonian patriarchate in Jerusalem and the anti-Chalcedonian circles in the south as a result of the activity of Nephalius. A monk

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 96–97; Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* I.42, p. 133, IX.2, p. 477. Romanus, a disciple of Passarion, founded a coenobium near Tekoa. He was among the leaders of the anti-Chalcedonian rebellion and the resistance after the Council of Chalcedon. Upon suppression of the rebellion, he was arrested and sent as a prisoner to Antioch. Later released, he returned to Palestine but preferred to leave his monastery near Tekoa and establish a new one west of Eleutheropolis, outside the direct jurisdiction of Juvenal, archbishop of Jerusalem, on land that was part of Eudocia's estate supported by her. This monastery quickly became an important stronghold in the Monophysite axis of resistance in southern Palestine. On Romanus and his monastery, see Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 89–90, 92.

¹⁶¹ The *laura* at Maiuma was apparently under the supervision of the coenobium, like the model that evolved in Abba Isaiah's monastery and later in Abba Seridus' monastery near Thabatha.

¹⁶² *V. Severi*, 97.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 98–100.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 100; Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* I.1, p. 8; *ibid.*, II.3, p. 248. Epiphanius had arrived in Palestine before Peter the Iberian's death and, complying with the request of Peter and other leaders, undertook the ordination of anti-Chalcedonian priests (*ibid.*, I.1, p. 8).

¹⁶⁵ On Severus' monastic life near Gaza and some of his fellow monks who later made an ecclesiastical career, see also *Sixth Book of Letters* I.5, p. 39, VII.5, p. 479.

from Alexandria, Nephalius had earlier aroused a storm in the Church at Alexandria, then joined the ecclesiastical circle of Jerusalem and, around 508, initiated activities against the anti-Chalcedonian camp in Palestine and its centre in the Gaza area. This led him to a confrontation with Severus, already recognized as a senior representative of Monophysite Christianity and monasticism in that area and perhaps in all of Palestine. According to Zacharias, Nephalius' activities, apparently with the support of the patriarch Elias and the Chalcedonian priesthood, included expelling many anti-Chalcedonian monks from their monasteries. The atmosphere of coexistence between anti-Chalcedonians and Chalcedonians that had long characterized the area was thus violated.¹⁶⁶

The persecution of local anti-Chalcedonians and the confrontation between Nephalius and Severus led to the latter's journey at the head of a group of his supporters to Constantinople. Together with other anti-Chalcedonian leaders—among them Theodore, the abbot of the monastery of Peter the Iberian, and Mamas, the head of the monastery of Romanus¹⁶⁷—Severus became increasingly involved in the Christological polemic and imperial ecclesiastical politics. He formed a close association with the emperor Anastasius, which led to the restoration of the anti-Chalcedonian monasteries. In his three years in the capital (508–511), Severus advanced from being one of the anti-Chalcedonian leaders in Palestine to being a senior leader of the anti-Chalcedonian camp in the empire. He returned briefly to his monastery in Maiuma; but the emperor, upon removing Flavian, the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch, chose Severus as his successor (512).¹⁶⁸ Severus continued to experience a stormy ecclesiastical career; however, those events and his many writings in this period on various topics do not fall within the scope of the present study.¹⁶⁹

With the appointment of Severus as patriarch of Antioch, the cur-

¹⁶⁶ *V. Severi*, 100–103. On this episode, see Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 148–51.

¹⁶⁷ On Severus and Mamas in Constantinople, see also Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Sabae* 55, ed. E. Schwartz (Leipzig, 1939) p. 147. According to Cyril, Sabas later convinced Mamas to adopt the Council of Chalcedon (*ibid.*).

¹⁶⁸ *V. Severi*, 103–11; Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 151–53; 160.

¹⁶⁹ For a detailed survey of Severus' ecclesiastical and literary career, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 202–76; P. Allen and C. T. R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch* (London, 2004).

tain comes down on the anti-Chalcedonian monastic centre of Gaza. Although it probably continued to exist for some time, no information whatsoever has reached us about it. The rise of the Chalcedonian emperor Justin (518) and his nephew Justinian and the changing politico-ecclesiastical climate led to the expulsion of anti-Chalcedonian bishops and monks from Syria (525–531).¹⁷⁰ In a letter to Theodore—abbot of Romanus’ monastery—Severus writes about the latter’s expulsion, together with other Palestinian abbots and monks, to Egypt.¹⁷¹ It may be that this also spelled the end of the anti-Chalcedonian monastic stronghold that had been formed in the southern coastal plain around Peter the Iberian and the members of his circle. The sole intimation regarding the fate of Peter the Iberian’s leading monastery near Maiuma is a brief mention by John of Ephesus of “a great convent called that of father Peter the Iberian. . . . This convent was expelled with the rest and came to the territory of Alexandria.”¹⁷²

Barsanuphius and John

Thabatha—the place of Hilarion’s birth and of his first monastery, and of Peter the Iberian’s sojourn before his flight to Phoenicia—became the stage of the next generation of Gaza monasticism. For it was here that Barsanuphius, John, and Abba Seridus, between the third and fifth decades of the sixth century, had their monastery. This community accepted the Council of Chalcedon, at least externally, but in fact it had few dealing with the Christological polemics of the period, and apparently preferred to withdraw into monastic piety.¹⁷³ A residue of adhesion to Monophysite ideals may nevertheless

¹⁷⁰ Ps. Zacharias, *Hist. Eccl.* VIII.5.

¹⁷¹ Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* I.55, p. 183.

¹⁷² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (John of Hephaestopolis), ed. E. W. Brooks, PO 18 (Paris, 1924), p. 527.

¹⁷³ Barsanuphius and John, *Questions and Answers*, 694–703. For a critical edition of the first 124 letters of Barsanuphius and John’s correspondence, with English translation, see D. J. Chitty, *Barsanuphius and John, Questions and Answers*, PO 31/3 (Paris, 1966). For a new critical edition with French translation, see F. Neyt, P. de Angelis-Noah, and L. Regnault, *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza: Correspondance*, SC 426–27, 450–51, 468 (Paris, 1997–2002). For the Greek text, see also the edition of Nicodemus Hagiorites (Venice, 1816 [2nd. rev. ed. corrected by S. N. Schoinas, Volos, 1960]). For an earlier edition of the French translation, see *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*. Recueil complet traduit du grec et du géorgien par les moines de Solesmes (Solesmes, 1993), 2nd edition. References are to the SC edition.

have continued to exist beneath the surface for some time.¹⁷⁴ In any case, this community faithfully continued the monastic legacy of Abba Isaiah, which, as we have seen, had some Monophysite overtones.¹⁷⁵ The monastery at Thabatha, run in accordance with Abba Isaiah's model, was led by Barsanuphius the Egyptian,¹⁷⁶ known as "the Great Old Man" and "the Prophet," due to his special gift of discernment (διόκρισις).¹⁷⁷ Living as a hermit in his cell, he ran the monastery through the mediation of his disciple Seridus, who served as abbot of the coenobium around which hermitages were scattered. Naturally, Seridus as head of the monastery and confidant of John and Barsanuphius figures prominently in the monks' letters to the two fathers, especially in matters relating to the relationship between the monks and their abbot. In general, however, the presence of Seridus remains fairly muted, in contrast with that of his masters. At some point, Barsanuphius left his cell in favor of his disciple John, who became his partner in the spiritual leadership of the monastery and was known as "the Second Old Man," and "the Prophet." John, like Barsanuphius, maintained contact with members of the monastery and the outside world through Seridus or another chosen disciple. The two conducted their spiritual direction by means of a wide correspondence with monks, churchmen, and laymen, among them some of the highest-ranking religious and political leaders in the province.¹⁷⁸ They included Peter, patriarch of Jerusalem (524–552), who consulted Barsanuphius on various questions relating to the governing of the Church;¹⁷⁹ and among the laymen were even teachers of philosophy, apparently from Gaza.¹⁸⁰

This correspondence, of which about 850 letters have come down to us, apparently redacted by one of their disciples, contains almost

¹⁷⁴ On the possibility that Gaza monastic leaders such as Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheus were some sort of crypto-Monophysites, see chap. 11, below.

¹⁷⁵ See F. Neyt, "Citations 'Isaïennes' chez Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza," *Le Muséon* 84 (1971), pp. 65–92.

¹⁷⁶ On his Egyptian origins, see *Questions and Answers*, 55.

¹⁷⁷ See *V. Dosithei* 1 (ed. and trans. in L. Regnault and J. de Préville, *Dorothee de Gaza. Oeuvres spirituelles*, SC 92 [Paris, 1963], pp. 122–145). The title "Prophet," apparently traditional at this time, was bestowed on monastic leaders of the previous generation such as Zeno and Abba Isaiah. See Van Parys, "Abba Silvain et ses disciples," pp. 477–78.

¹⁷⁸ On the written word as a spiritual guide, see R. Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century* (Minneapolis, 1991), pp. 35–61.

¹⁷⁹ *Questions and Answers*, 813–30.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 664–66, 778.

no biographical data on Barsanuphius and John, but it constitutes a unique source for the study of Byzantine monasticism.¹⁸¹ It provides a rare opportunity to observe spiritual direction—usually oral and private—in action, documented in the immediate and daily context of questions and answers, as a result of the conditions of extreme seclusion of the spiritual fathers.¹⁸² Abba Isaiah's conception of monasticism is reflected in these letters, but they provide more conspicuously a detailed picture of a concrete, practical spirituality as applied in the monks' day-to-day life. This spiritual direction is founded on the demand for complete obedience to the abbot of the monastery and the annihilation of the monk's own free will.¹⁸³ We are able here to observe the disciples of the Old Men as they struggle with their difficulties and temptations, and to learn of their weaknesses

¹⁸¹ For brief surveys of Barsanuphius and John, see I. Hausherr, "Barsanuphe," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 1, cols. 1255–1262; L. Regnault, "Jean de Gaza," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 8, cols. 536–38; Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 132–40; Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 296–307. The litereray genre of *erotapokriseis*, having long roots in antiquity, flourished especially in the post-Justinian period, see C. Heinrich, *Griechisch-byzantische Gesprächsbücher* (Leipzig, 1911); H. Dörrie and H. Dörries, "Erotapokriseis," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 6 (1966), cols. 342–70; G. Dagron, "Le saint, le savant, l'astrologue: Étude de thèmes hagiographiques à travers quelques recueils de "Questions et réponses" des V^e–VII^e siècles," *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés IV^e–XII^e siècles*. Actes du Colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Paris (2–5 May 1979), pp. 143–52; A. Volgers and C. Zamagni (eds.), *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*. Biblical Exegesis and Theology 37 (Leuven, 2004).

¹⁸² The extreme seclusion of Barsanuphius led to speculation that he was the figment of Seridus' imagination, and this forced Barsanuphius to appear in public to dispel doubts (*Questions and Answers*, 125). On the spiritual direction in monasticism, see I. Hausherr, *Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 144 (Rome, 1955). The collection of questions and answers also includes several long series of letters between the elders and certain monks. We have not been able to consult Neyt's study on the exchange of letters between Dorotheus and the two elders. F. Neyt, "Les lettres à Dorothee dans la correspondance de Barsanuphe et de Jean de Gaza" (thèse dactylographiée, Louvain, 1969). On those between the elders and John of Beersheba, see L. Perrone, "Eis ton hesychias limena. Le lettere a Giovanni di Beersheba nella corrispondenza di Barsanufio e Giovanni di Gaza," in *Mémorial dom Jean Gribomont (1920–1986)*, (Rome, 1988), pp. 463–86.

¹⁸³ Some aspects of the spiritual direction of Barsanuphius and John are discussed by Tugwell, *Ways of Perfection*, pp. 83–92; J. Chrysavgis, "Aspects of Spiritual Direction: The Palestinian Tradition," in P. Allen and E. Jeffreys (eds.), *The Sixth Century, End or Beginning?* (Brisbane, 1996), pp. 126–30; L. Perrone, "The Necessity of Advice: Spiritual Direction as a School of Christianity in the Correspondance of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza," in Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*. On the monastic virtues of obedience and the annihilation of self will in the *Apophthegmata*, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers*, pp. 34–36, 52–58.

and their suffering as well as their victories and virtues. Barsanuphius and John's main sources of inspiration were the Bible, Abba Isaiah, the *Apophthegmata*, Evagrius, and Basil of Caesarea, and their spiritual direction consisted primarily of an intensive interpretation and application of these writings. In their use of ascetic terminology, they reflect a psychological and personal tone, their main goal being to guide the conscience (ὠφέλεια ψυχῆς).¹⁸⁴ These questions and answers cover a wide variety of topics pertaining to the daily existence of the monk in his semi-coenobitic monastery, and they include material and seemingly trivial matters alongside questions on monastic spirituality.¹⁸⁵

The correspondence between Barsanuphius and John and various laymen touches on all domains of life and draws a clear picture of the leadership and spiritual authority of the holy man to whom his followers turned for advice and guidance, not only in religious matters but also in practical questions of daily life. The collection portrays a holy man, not only playing a pivotal role in the monastic setting of Gaza but exerting an influence that extended to the Christian society of sixth-century Palestine as a whole.

Seridus and his successor Aelianus

The figure of Abbot Seridus is present in the background of many of the letters in this collection, particularly those dealing with obedience and the leadership of the coenobium, and the monks' relation with the abbot. However, the editor of the collection, in an exceptionally long comment, relates some specific information about Seridus. The abbot was an extreme ascetic; his practices almost led to his death before he was healed by Barsanuphius and became his obedient disciple until his dying day. Barsanuphius regarded him as a true son. According to the editor, Seridus was gifted with a charismatic personality and the ability to bring about compromise and peace; likewise, he was possessed of exceptional patience and

¹⁸⁴ See F. Neyt, "Le vocabulaire de Barsanuphe et de Jean de Gaza," *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975), pp. 247–53; D. Hombergen, "Le fonti scritturistiche e patristiche dei padri di Gaza," in Chialà and Cremaschi (eds.), *Il deserto di Gaza: Barsanufio, Giovanni e Doroteo*, pp. 81–98.

¹⁸⁵ For the conception of the monastic spiritual ideal in this circle, see L. Regnault, "Théologie de la vie monastique selon Barsanuphe et Dorothee," in *Théologie de la vie monastique* (Paris, 1961), pp. 315–22.

mental serenity. He was loved by the monks and planted joy in their hearts.¹⁸⁶ Yet from the complaints of various monks regarding the abbot, it appears that their relationship was not always idyllic; at the same time, there is no evidence of particular tension or feelings of collective bitterness against Seridus, such as we know of with regard to Sabas and Shenoute.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, Seridus' tolerant nature and pedagogic tendencies, are clearly evident in the long series of questions that Dorotheus directed to the elders, many of which deal with his relationship to the abbot. This impression is further strengthened by the story of the training of the young monk Dositheus, recorded in a brief anonymous text in which Seridus plays an important role.¹⁸⁸

Under Seridus' leadership and at his initiative, the monastery was expanded after the purchase of adjacent land, on which were built a church and a hostel (ξενοδοχεῖον). This matter was dependent on delicate negotiations to win over the owner of the property, who at first refused to sell it, along with the evacuation of a monk who had leased a site for a hermitage. Seridus was criticized by one of the monastery's lay supporters because of his lenient handling of the matter. Details of the incident reveal Seridus' powers of diplomatic maneuvering and persuasion, which involved achieving compromises among the various parties.¹⁸⁹

On the eve of his death from a serious illness, Seridus ordained that the leadership of the monastery should pass to one of the monks in accordance with the order determined by him. At the end of the list Seridus placed Aelianus, a lay disciple, on condition that he became a monk. The story of the appointment of the new abbot appears fairly exceptional and indicates a certain flexibility in the patterns of organization and leadership in this monastic community.¹⁹⁰ The first monk on the list of successors refused to take his place, and the rest followed suit. Aelianus had been considering entering monastic life for some time and had consulted Barsanuphius and John regarding the best way to arrange his financial and family

¹⁸⁶ *Questions and Answers*, 570c.

¹⁸⁷ Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Sabae* 19, 33, 35; Patrich, *Sabas*, pp. 197–202; Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, pp. 48–49, 88–89.

¹⁸⁸ See *V. Dositheï*.

¹⁸⁹ *Questions and Answers*, 570c. On Seridus and his monastery, see also S. Vailhé, "Jean le prophète et Séridos," *Échos d'Orient* 8 (1905), pp. 159–60.

¹⁹⁰ *Questions and Answers*, 599.

affairs. Upon learning of Seridus' death, Aelianus was attacked by grief and fear, even before learning that Seridus had placed him on the list of successors. He turned to John, who ignored Aelianus' questions about sadness, fear, and retribution in the world to come, stressing the principle of obedience and circumspectly urging that he accept the leadership of the monastery. Aelianus was puzzled, but when John explained matters to him and instructed him to accept responsibility for the monastery, Aelianus complied.¹⁹¹

Aelianus first received the monastic robe; he was then ordained to the priesthood (apparently by the bishop of Gaza or of Maiuma) and thus became abbot.¹⁹² His first act was to go to John, who received him as abbot and asked Aelianus to bless him by virtue of his new status. Aelianus questioned John as to why he had conceded to the refusal of the monks who had preceded him, why they had refused the honor, and why the position had been forced on him, who lacked any experience of monastic life. John's reply was that all the monks had refused out of humility, choosing Aelianus, in fact, by a process of elimination. John and Barsanuphius had accepted their refusal and chosen Aelianus because they saw in this the will of God, and not because of the recalcitrance of the monks listed in Seridus' testament.¹⁹³ The episode of the selection of Aelianus to succeed Seridus is undoubtedly exceptional; it is difficult to find any precedent for it. It may be that the choice was made from some practical considerations unknown to us. In any case, the practical skill of Aelianus and his realistic view of his new position are reflected in the series of questions he posed to John about the management of the monastery.¹⁹⁴

John himself did not live long after the death of Seridus; he died about two weeks later, having lived in retreat for some eighteen years in Barsanuphius' old cell. On the eve of his death, John gathered the monks of the monastery about him, embraced each in turn, took his leave of them, and gave up his spirit.¹⁹⁵ At that same time Barsanuphius completely retreated from the world.¹⁹⁶ With the deaths

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 571–75.

¹⁹² Ibid., 575b.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 576.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 577–97.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 599b.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

of John and Seridus, and the continued refusal of Barsanuphius to reply to questions put to him, our access to further knowledge about the community comes to an end.

Dorotheus

There are four principal historical sources regarding the life and monastic teaching of Dorotheus, the most famous disciple of Barsanuphius and John: his correspondence with the two through Seridus, which includes over a hundred letters;¹⁹⁷ the anonymous text *The Life of Dositheus*, a disciple of Dorotheus, apparently written by another of Dorotheus' disciples; instructions to the monks in his own monastery that Dorotheus wrote after he had left the monastery of Seridus in the fifth decade of the sixth century; and a few of his letters.¹⁹⁸ The biographical information about Dorotheus in these sources—especially telling of his first steps in the monastic life—is sparse. He was apparently born at the beginning of the sixth century in Antioch and died in his monastery near Gaza in the seventh or ninth decade of the that century.¹⁹⁹ He began his monastic career in the coenobium of Seridus, at an unknown time. There he absorbed the monastic tradition under the guidance of Barsanuphius and John, and also served the latter for nine years.²⁰⁰ The literary work of Dorotheus, as well as his occupation in medicine, testify to a broad education. At the command of Barsanuphius and John, he took upon himself the responsibility for the monastery's hostel and also agreed to serve as porter, an appointment that reflects the fathers' confidence in their disciple.²⁰¹ He was also asked by them to establish and run a clinic in the monastery, in which he was aided financially by his brother, who was sympathetic to the monastic way

¹⁹⁷ On the identification of the letters, see the authors' note in the foreword to the French edition of the writings of Dorotheus, pp. 10–11 and the notes there. The group of letters whose identification is not in doubt numbers some 86. Barsanuphius and John, *Questions and Answers*, 252–338.

¹⁹⁸ Dorothee de Gaza, *Oeuvres Spirituelles*, ed. and trans. L. Regnault and J. de Préville, SC 92 (Paris, 1963) (hereinafter *Instructions*).

¹⁹⁹ This according to the legendary biography of Barsanuphius written in southern Italy at the end of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth. On this biography, see *Instructions*, p. 10 and n. 2.

²⁰⁰ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 56, pp. 240–42.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 119, p. 368.

of life.²⁰² He himself cared for ailing monks, with the assistance of Dositheus, and more than once complained of the burden of the work. Dorotheus had brought a library with him to the monastery that included medical books;²⁰³ but he was concerned that he should perhaps restrict himself to the methods of healing used by those who did not read medical literature, such as oil and words. Barsanuphius, however, encouraged Dorotheus to make use of his medical books.²⁰⁴

After the death of John and Barsanuphius' retreat into total seclusion, Dorotheus left Seridus' monastery and settled in another one "between Gaza and Maiuma."²⁰⁵ The reasons for his departure are not clear, and the question of whether Dorotheus was the founder of a new monastery or joined one that already existed is unresolved.²⁰⁶ However, its coenobitic nature is obvious from the instructions he wrote to his monks and the imagery he invoked in describing life in the monastery.²⁰⁷ To the question, "What is a coenobium?" Dorotheus responded that for him, a coenobium is analogous to a living body; it unites all of its parts, each of which has a particular function in the life of the monastery and of the monk.²⁰⁸

Dorotheus' writings include instructions to monks and letters that give us a glimpse of his cultural world and his monastic teachings. They are characterized by their lack of originality and their eclectic nature, and express a predilection for preserving and systemizing monastic tradition. Like Barsanuphius, he was not inclined toward speculative discussions, but was rather interested in practical spiritual guidance for the monks. His monastic teachings combine traditions characteristic of Basilian and Pachomian monasticism, advocating communal life, as well as the teachings of Evagrius and Barsanuphius,

²⁰² *V. Dosithei*, 1, p. 122; Barsanuphius, *Questions and Answers*, 330; Dorotheus, *Instructions*, 121, p. 370.

²⁰³ *Questions and Answers*, 326–27.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁰⁵ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow* 166, PG 87/3 col. 3033a; See also Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothee de Gaza*, p. 27.

²⁰⁶ For a different analysis of Dorotheus' later career, see E. P. Wheeler (trans.), *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo, 1977): CS 33, pp. 56–67. P. Canivet suggested that Dorotheus had to leave the monastery because of his possible Origenist sympathies. See P. Canivet, "Dorothee de Gaza, est-il un disciple d'Évagre?" *Revue des études grecques* 78 (1965), p. 338.

²⁰⁷ The coenobitic monastic ideal of Dorotheus is discussed in the sixth instruction, pp. 268–87.

²⁰⁸ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 77, p. 284.

who represent the tradition of the anchorites at Scetis.²⁰⁹ These two threads were interwoven in the writings of Dorotheus and also in the daily routine of his monastery. He was also influenced by Zosimas, a native of the region of Tyre who, after his stay in the laura of Gerasimus near Jericho,²¹⁰ founded a monastery in the neighbourhood of Caesarea at the beginning of the sixth century.²¹¹ Zosimas was the author of the *Alloquia* (conversations, words of encouragement), a collection of sayings on the monastic way of life,²¹² from which Dorotheus quoted;²¹³ he may even have been the editor of the collection.²¹⁴ In his *Instructions*, Dorotheus presents ideas and concepts from Greek philosophy and theological concepts of Greek ecclesiastical writers alongside anecdotes from his personal experience. It is his adaptation of this amalgam to the coenobitic reality of his monastery that gives Dorotheus' spiritual direction its distinct character.

Obedience and humility were the two central ideals by which Dorotheus undertook to direct the coenobitic life. The ideal of absolute obedience to a spiritual father he absorbed from Barsanuphius, and he himself bequeathed it to his disciple Dositheus. As scholars have noted, Dorotheus did not devote a separate discussion in his writings to obedience, but it constitutes an essential component of his spiritual guidance.²¹⁵ The centrality of the ideal of obedience in the teachings of Dorotheus is explicitly expressed in the brief biography of his disciple Dositheus.²¹⁶ Through obedience and the extinction of individual will, Dorotheus sought to reach his main goal: to be

²⁰⁹ See Dorotheus, *Letter to the Anchorites*, I, 180–83, in idem, *Instructions*, pp. 488–97; *Questions and Answers* 318–319.

²¹⁰ On the laura of Gerasimus, see Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 13, 28–29, 180–82.

²¹¹ He is also mentioned by the sixth century historian Evagrius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.7. ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London, 1898).

²¹² PG 78, 1680–1701, incomplete edition. A complete edition of the sayings was published in Jerusalem in 1913 by Augoustinos Monachos.

²¹³ See, for example, *Instructions*, 14, p. 168; 77, p. 282; 91, p. 310.

²¹⁴ See Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p. 140. On Zosimas, see also S. Vailhé, “Saint Dorothee et saint Zosime,” *Échos d’orient* 4 (1900/1901), pp. 359–63.

²¹⁵ Dorotheus' concept of obedience is discussed by T. Spidlik, “Le concept de l’obéissance et de la conscience selon Dorothee de Gaza,” *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972), pp. 72–78.

²¹⁶ See, for example, *V. Dositheï*, 9–10, 13.

“the true disciple of Christ,”²¹⁷ “to resemble the Son of God.”²¹⁸

Anyone perusing the teachings of Dorotheus has no difficulty in discerning that the ideal way of life that he preached in the framework of coenobitic life was suited to all who wished to abide by the Christian faith and not solely the minority who chose a life of retreat and monasticism. In fact, among his instructions to the monks, only abandonment of property and renunciation of marriage applied exclusively to them.²¹⁹ This standpoint, which advocated blurring the borders between monastic life and the life of all Christians, is identical in its approach to that of Basil the Great, whose ascetic writings sketch the image of the ideal Christian.²²⁰ However, while Basil’s writings were appropriate to his position as bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia and probably found a broad resonance, the echoes of Dorotheus’ universal Christian message were swallowed up by the walls of his coenobium “between Gaza and Maiuma.” It may be that here lies the explanation for the fact that the data in his writings regarding the daily life of the monastery are meager. He was interested primarily in the teaching of spiritual principles, which drew their authority from the ideal of obedience and had as their goal to approach God in the most perfect manner.²²¹

The large number of Dorotheus’ manuscripts testifies to the wide distribution and influence his teachings earned. His instructions were popular in Orthodox Christianity, especially among the monks of Sinai, Athos, and Russia. His work was translated into Latin, and from the eleventh century made its way into the monasteries of the West and even beyond.²²² No additional data from the scions of Seridus or Dorotheus remain; in fact, no further data on Gaza monasticism in the next generations exist, save for two isolated items testifying that the monasteries were still in existence at the beginning

²¹⁷ *Questions and Answers*, 308.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

²¹⁹ Dorotheus, *Instructions*, Foreword, p. 81.

²²⁰ P. Rousseau dedicated a broad discussion to this approach in the ascetic writings of Basil. See P. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 192–232.

²²¹ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 48, p. 222; 21–25, pp. 178–84. Dorotheus was well acquainted with the ascetic writings of Basil, and cited them to his monks.

²²² Dorotheus, *Instructions*, Foreword, pp. 91–97. L. Regnault, “Monachisme orientale et spiritualité ignatienne. L’influence de S. Dorothee sur les écrivains de la Compagnie de Jésus,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 33 (1957), pp. 141–49.

of the seventh century: In the biography of John “the Almsgiver,” patriarch of Alexandria (610–620), there is mention of “the monastery of Abba Seridon” near Gaza,²²³ while John Moschus mentions the coenobium of Dorotheus near Gaza and Maiuma.²²⁴

Despite the ecclesiastical and theological changes undergone by the monastic community of Gaza, the nearly three centuries of its history outlined in this chapter attest to the unbroken development of and adherence to its ascetic traditions. The continuity of the monastic settlements in the region throughout this period, and the ongoing transmission of their ascetic tradition from generation to generation, led to the emergence of a distinct monastic school. This school witnessed the meteoric rise of charismatic leaders to the imperial heights of ecclesiastical politics, adding a cosmopolitan dimension to its rural and regional character. Outstanding among these leaders was Peter the Iberian, whose career and personal charm will be further discussed in the next two chapters.

²²³ Leontius of Neapolis, *The Life of John the Almsgiver* 36, ed. A.-J. Festugière and L. Rydén (Paris, 1974).

²²⁴ John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow* 166, PG 87/3 col. 3033a. The story cited by Moschus tells of a particular relationship between the monastery of Dorotheus and the laura of Firminus in the Judean Desert during this period. On the archaeological findings from the laura of Firminus in the Judean Desert, see Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 27, 117, 141, 157, 169, 173.

THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF A MONASTIC CENTRE

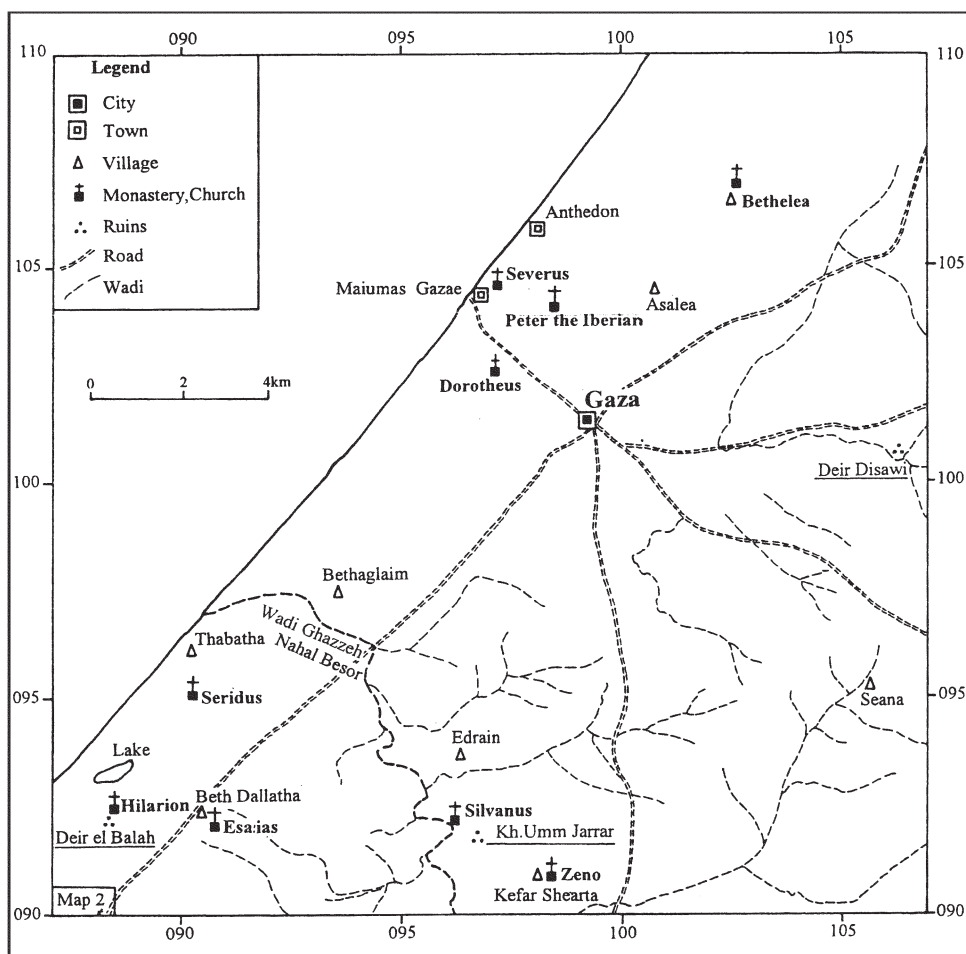


Fig. 1. Map of the monasteries in the close vicinity of Gaza.
(Courtesy of Y. Hirschfeld)

CHAPTER ONE

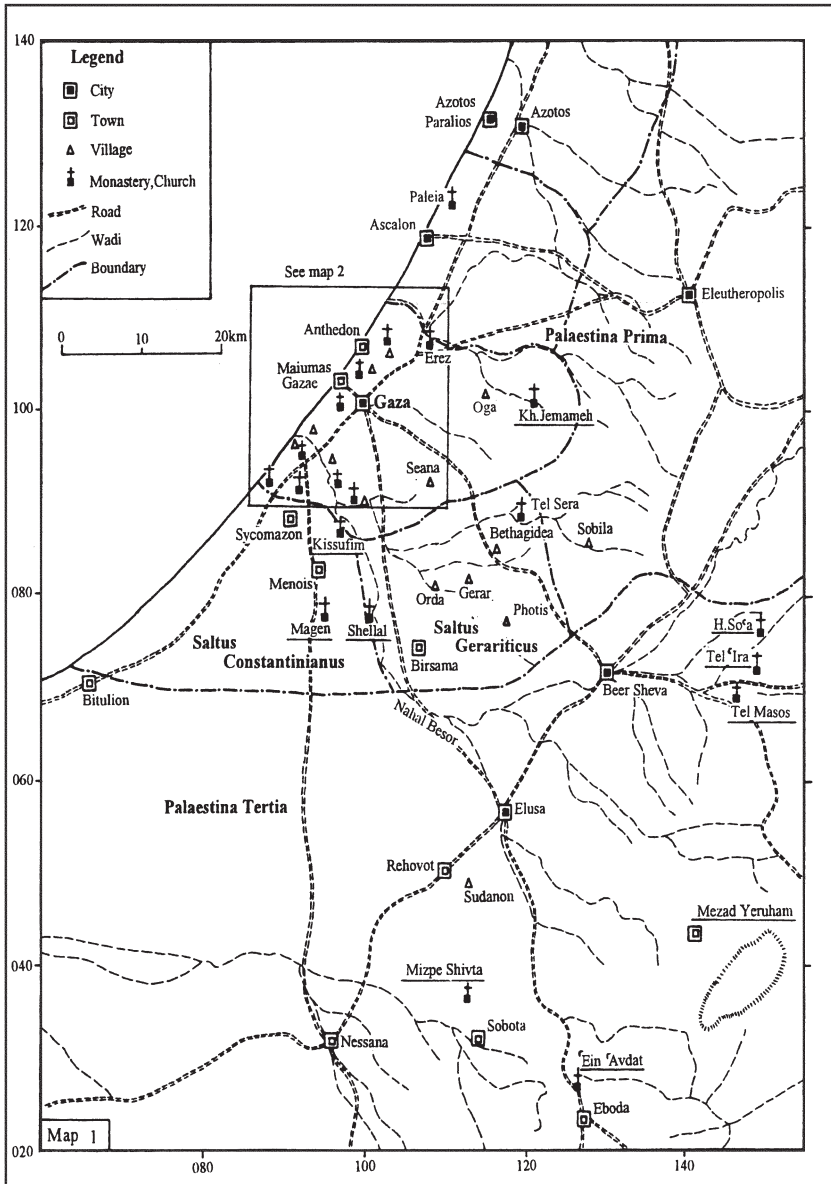


Fig. 2. Location map of the monasteries of Gaza and the Negev.
(Courtesy of Y. Hirschfeld)

CHAPTER TWO

PETER THE IBERIAN AND THE ANTI-CHALCEDONIAN RESISTANCE IN PALESTINE

Of the numerous Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land in late antiquity, many ended up in Palestine for years, or even stayed for the rest of their lives. These one-way pilgrims constitute a significant sub-group in the mass movement of Holy Land pilgrimage from the fourth century to the Muslim conquest. The pilgrim-settlers included laymen, priests, and monks—men and women from all strata of society. The significance of aristocratic pilgrimage to the holy places has been pointed out by E. D. Hunt in his study *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire*. He demonstrated the continuity of this upper-class pilgrimage, its settlement in Jerusalem centering on the establishments of Melania the Elder and Rufinus on the Mount of Olives, and its ties with the imperial court in Constantinople. The holy places became a focus of imperial attention and of the ecclesiastical politics of early Byzantine times.¹ Robert Wilken has masterfully traced the role of the early Byzantine Christians of Palestine, transforming the province into the Christian Holy Land as a result of a growing sense of patriotism.² A central role in this process was played by pilgrims who decided to settle in the country. Similarly it may be of interest to examine the part played by pilgrim-settlers in the general Christian transformation of Palestine. Monasticism at this time became an important reservoir for ecclesiastical appointments, and the involvement of monks—among them Palestinian monks—in Byzantine ecclesiastical politics intensified.³ Representatives of Euthymius (d. 473), leader of Judean Desert monasticism in the mid-fifth century, for example, attended the first and second Councils of Ephesus (431, 449) and the Council of Chalcedon (451).⁴

¹ E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire A.D. 312–460* (Oxford, 1984).

² Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*.

³ On the role of monks in the ecclesiastical organization of the Palestinian Church, see Y. Ashkenazi, “The Patriarchate of Jerusalem: Its Organization and Its Place in the Christian Society of Byzantine Palestine,” Ph.D. diss., University of Haifa, 1999 (in Hebrew).

⁴ See Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii*, 20, 27.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 aroused an anti-Chalcedonian opposition in parts of the Eastern empire and an open revolt in Egypt and Palestine.⁵ Following suppression of the anti-Chalcedonian revolt in Palestine, the anti-Chalcedonians in Jerusalem, in other holy places, and in Palestine as a whole seem to have faced a particular dilemma in light of the new domination of Jerusalem and the holy places by the Chalcedonians and the persecution and expulsion of anti-Chalcedonian leaders. The predicament of the Palestinian anti-Chalcedonians seems to have created special problems in local anti-Chalcedonian circles with regard to the holy places and to pilgrimage to these sites. These issues are exemplified in the life and times of Peter the Iberian—prince, pilgrim, monk, miracle worker and visionary, bishop, and charismatic anti-Chalcedonian master.

Peter, whose original name was Nabarnugios,⁶ was sent at the age of twelve as a political hostage to the court of Theodosius II (408–450) in Constantinople to ensure the allegiance of Iberia (Georgia) to the Byzantines against a possible pro-Persian political shift.⁷ Nabarnugios grew up in the imperial court under the parental care of the emperor and his wife, Eudocia.⁸ He was put in charge of the royal horses in the capital,⁹ but he became increasingly devout and developed ascetic inclinations, which he cultivated together with his companion and religious guide John the Eunuch (originally named Mithridates). Peter's ascetic behaviour and demands led to complaints by the palace staff, but he ignored them and converted his room into a small shrine where he cherished the relics of Persian martyrs.¹⁰ He yearned to escape and make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His slaves tried to dissuade him and even to prevent such an escapade by force; and its political implications may have given him pause. But when he was

⁵ On the anti-Chalcedonian revolt in Palestine, see E. Honigmann, "Juvenal of Jerusalem," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950), pp. 211–79; Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 89–91; Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, pp. 149–53; Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 89–103; Winkelmann, "Konzeptionen des Verhältnisses von Kirche und Staat," pp. 73–85.

⁶ John of Beth Rufina (Rufus), *V. Petri Ib.* 4. For a detailed summary of the *vita* in French, see J. B. Chabot, "Pierre l'Ibérien, Évêque Monophysite de Mayouma [Gaza] à la fin du V^e Siècle," *Revue de l'Orient Latin* 3 (1895), pp. 367–97.

⁷ *V. Petri Ib.* 15–16. On the Georgian background of Peter the Iberian, see Horn, "The Career of Peter the Iberian," pp. 38–45.

⁸ *V. Petri Ib.* 16.

⁹ Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.* 3, 4.

¹⁰ *V. Petri Ib.* 17–18, 21; Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3, 4.

about twenty years of age he finally decided to embark on a pilgrimage to the holy places together with John.¹¹

The author of Peter's *vita*, John Rufus, disciple and companion of Peter in his old age and later his successor as bishop of Maiuma, does not tell us whether they intended to stay in the holy places or eventually to return to Constantinople. We are merely told that since Peter was a hostage they had to escape from the capital dressed as slaves.¹² However, it seems that no one actually pursued them, and once in Jerusalem no one bothered to escort them back to Constantinople, despite the fact that their presence in the holy city was common knowledge. On their pilgrim route through Asia Minor and Syria, Peter and John carried with them the Gospel of John and relics of the martyrs in a golden box, in which Peter placed the fragment of the holy cross he had received from clerics who brought such fragments from Jerusalem to the emperor.¹³ After some trouble en route (they were mistaken for fugitive slaves and arrested),¹⁴ they came within sight of Jerusalem and entered the city as devout pilgrims.¹⁵ Melania the Younger received Peter and John at her monastery for men on the Mount of Olives, and Gerontius—a native of Jerusalem and the head of the monastery—bestowed on them the monastic garb in a ceremony in the Anastasis, along with their new names, Peter and John.¹⁶ Melania had met Peter previously during a visit to Constantinople, where she was instrumental in the betrothal of the princess Eudoxia (daughter of Theodosius II and Eudocia) to the co-emperor Valentinian III. She may on that occasion have inspired Peter's desire to follow her example.¹⁷ We can see, then, the natural connection of Peter, the princely pilgrim, with Melania and the monastic centre on the Mount of Olives in the initial stages of his career in Palestine. This early association was further cemented by the deposition of the relics of the Persian martyrs brought by Peter and John, together with relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (in Armenia) and a relic of Stephen, in a *martyrion* built by Melania

¹¹ *V. Petri Ib.* 20, 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23–24, 39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26–27. For an analysis of Peter and John's pilgrimage to Jerusalem, see below.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30–32.

¹⁷ *V. Petri Ib.* 30. On Melania's visit to Constantinople, see also *V. Melan.* 53–56.

on the mountain. Cyril of Alexandria conducted this ceremony, having come to Jerusalem to celebrate the foundation of the Church of Stephen, initiated by Eudocia which had taken place the day before, during the first pilgrimage of the empress to the holy places (438/439).¹⁸ The ties between Eudocia, Melania, and Peter were thus renewed, strengthening the aristocratic milieu in Jerusalem.

Peter and John, however, did not limit themselves to the holy places in Jerusalem. We learn indirectly of at least one journey to Transjordan with another monk to visit holy sites, especially the tomb of Moses on Mount Nebo.¹⁹ Perhaps John Rufus, in light of Peter's later attitude toward the holy places and pilgrimage, suppressed further information showing Peter and John as typical pilgrims on the conventional pilgrimage routes. Another sign of their veneration of the holy places at this early stage was their special visit to the Anastasis, seeking a cure for the facial skin ailment afflicting John.²⁰

Indeed, Peter decided to become not a king in Iberia but a monk in Jerusalem. His *vita* reflects a characteristic ambivalence of the late antique holy man: On the one hand he is portrayed by Rufus as someone who, motivated by extreme asceticism, severed his contacts with the secular world; on the other hand it seems he was constantly driven to public activity. This inherent tension came to characterize the entire life of the charismatic ascetic.²¹ He cherished his family and held an annual memorial day for his departed relatives,²² yet as a monk he refused to receive correspondence from his family; and when he heard that his mother intended to visit him he ran away to Cyprus.²³ This monastic attitude regarding ties with family was not universal in monastic circles. Sabas, for instance, visited his parents

¹⁸ *V. Petri* *Ib.* 33–34. On Eudocia and her career in Palestine, see K. G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 112–224. On Cyril's ties with Palestine, see F. M. Abel, "St. Cyrille d'Alexandrie dans ses rapports avec la Palestine," *Kyriana 444–1944* (Cairo, 1947), pp. 214–20.

¹⁹ *V. Petri* *Ib.* 85. For Transjordan and Mount Nebo as pilgrimage sites, see below.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

²¹ A similar tension is reflected in the lives of famous figures in Byzantine monasticism such as Sabas (439–532) and Theodore of Sykeon (d. 613). For Sabas, see Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae*. For Theodore of Sykeon, see *Vie de Théodore de Sykeon*, ed. A.-J. Festugière. *Subsidia Hagiographica* 48 (Brussels, 1970).

²² *V. Petri* *Ib.* 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

in Alexandria and received his old mother on her visit to Jerusalem.²⁴

Peter maintained a rigid ascetic discipline in Jerusalem but was unhappy with it;²⁵ he wished to emulate Passarion—to build a house for the monks and take care of the poor.²⁶ Eventually he left the monastery on the Mount of Olives and built his own monastery north of the Church of Sion near David's tower (later called the monastery of the Iberians). Apparently the plot of land was given to him free of charge as part of the general policy to encourage building in Jerusalem, in view of the relative paucity of buildings and population in the city.²⁷ But Peter and John did not restrict their activities to their new monastery. Rufus reluctantly admits that they left Constantinople with a considerable sum of money; they distributed this money mostly to the monks and the poor, the rest apparently being spent on the monastery, converted now to a pilgrims' hostel, where they housed and fed pilgrims at their own expense.²⁸ Becoming thus heavily involved in pilgrim activity in the city, Peter and John neglected the monastic way of life. It was the venerable monk Zeno, disciple of the famous Silvanus, who recalled them to their monastic vocation. They entered one of the monasteries and later returned to their own house near the tower of David.²⁹ During his sojourn in Jerusalem Bishop Juvenal wished to ordain Peter as a priest, but Peter, faithful to the monastic tradition of avoiding any authoritarian position, managed to flee.³⁰ When the empress Eudocia settled in Jerusalem (c. 441/442) and wished to meet her protégé, he avoided answering her call, so she decided to go to him. When she wished to visit him again he took Zeno's advice and departed to a monastery located between Gaza and Maiuma.³¹ Thus in the second stage of Peter's sojourn in Jerusalem, Zeno became his spiritual guide, and contact was established between Peter and the monastic centre in the Gaza region, and Zeno's circle. Apparently,

²⁴ *V. Sabae* 9, 25.

²⁵ *V. Petri Ib.* 34.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35. Passarion (d. 429) was an important figure in the Jerusalem Church and in monastic circles in the early fifth century. He founded an almshouse outside the east gate of the city and a coenobium within the walls of the Church of Sion. See Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p. 86.

²⁷ *V. Petri Ib.* 44–45.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 50; John Rufus, *Plerophoriae* 42, p. 93.

³¹ *V. Petri Ib.* 49.

despite secluding himself far from Jerusalem, Peter had become a celebrity, with a reputation for escaping ordination. Ultimately, he was ambushed and ordained by Juvenal's nephew, Paul, bishop of Maiuma³² (the ordination may have been orchestrated by Juvenal himself with Paul's assistance). Peter, however, avoided serving as a priest for the next seven years until he became bishop of Maiuma during the anti-Chalcedonian revolt against Chalcedon. It is noteworthy that during his seclusion in Irenion's monastery near Maiuma, before Chalcedon, Peter had visited Jerusalem at least once, about three years before the council.³³ We may sense here Rufus' identification of the seeds of anti-Chalcedonian opposition to Juvenal—a demonic figure in post-Chalcedonian Monophysite literature due to his “betrayal” of the anti-Chalcedonian cause—already in the time prior to the Council of Chalcedon.

When attempts to persuade Juvenal to retract his position at Chalcedon failed, the monk Theodosius was elected as anti-Chalcedonian archbishop of Jerusalem. According to John Rufus, Peter, in trying to convince Juvenal to retract, played an important albeit reluctant role even in the early stages of the revolt.³⁴ To strengthen the anti-Chalcedonian hold on the communities, many new bishops were appointed, with an eye to popular support among their communities.³⁵ The people of Maiuma forced their will on Peter, or so Rufus would have us believe: Paraded to Jerusalem to receive his appointment from the rebel archbishop, Theodosius, Peter tried to escape by jumping off a roof one night at a stop on the way, but a voice from heaven held him back. While in Jerusalem he argued ceaselessly that he was unworthy of priestly office.³⁶ Peter became the rebel bishop of Maiuma.³⁷ He tried to avoid officiating at the Mass, but he was forced to do so by public demand.³⁸

³² Ibid., 51. See also C. Horn, “Peter the Iberian and Palestinian Anti-Chalcedonian Monasticism,” pp. 116–117.

³³ *Plerophoriae* 53, pp. 108–109.

³⁴ Ibid., 56, pp. 111–113.

³⁵ *V. Petri Ib.* 52–53; *Plerophoriae* 25, p. 62. Cyril of Scythopolis presents a brief, negative Chalcedonian account of the revolt and its leader, Theodosius (*V. Euthymii* 27), against the anti-Chalcedonian version. Peter the Iberian is not mentioned in Cyril's account.

³⁶ *V. Petri Ib.* 54.

³⁷ For the anti-Chalcedonian revolt and the forced ordination of Peter by Theodosius, see also Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3, 3–4.

³⁸ *V. Petri Ib.* 55.

Peter served as bishop for six months before the revolt was crushed and Juvenal was reinstated as archbishop of Jerusalem. The anti-Chalcedonian bishops appointed by Theodosius were banished by decree. Peter, however, was exempted from exile by Pulcheria, sister of the (now late) emperor Theodosius and wife of the Chalcedonian emperor Marcian.³⁹ Peter apparently pondered his situation for some time; eventually deciding to share the fate of his brethren, he left for Alexandria, where he lived in hiding.⁴⁰ After the anti-Chalcedonian riots in Alexandria against the new Chalcedonian bishop Proterius, Peter found refuge in Oxyrhynchus in the Thebaid. At this point the author of the *vita* discloses for the first time that Peter was all along engaged in semi-clandestine anti-Chalcedonian activity on his own initiative.⁴¹ So Peter now emerges as an active anti-Chalcedonian leader fighting for the cause. After the death of the emperor Marcian (457), Peter returned to Alexandria and, together with Eusebius of Pelusium, ordained Timothy as archbishop to the applause of an Alexandrian crowd of monks and laymen. According to John Rufus, he was called to the task because all anti-Chalcedonian bishops were still in hiding and unavailable.⁴² Remaining in Egypt, Peter was important in reorganizing and encouraging the anti-Chalcedonians during the difficult years of a new anti-Monophysite wave under the emperor Leo (457–474).⁴³

Peter finally returned to Palestine at about the age of fifty,⁴⁴ this time as an accomplished, charismatic, and experienced leader, and a valiant combatant for the faith. Though continuing to head his old monastery near Gaza,⁴⁵ he did not settle there permanently but dwelt in Peleia,⁴⁶ no longer as an ascetic hermit but as a public figure, an anti-Chalcedonian holy man performing miracles, healing,

³⁹ Ibid., 57; Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.* 3, 5; John Rufus, *De Obitu Theodosii* 21; John of Beth Aptonia, *V. Severi*, 222.

⁴⁰ Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.* 3, 7; *V. Petri Ib.* 58.

⁴¹ *V. Petri Ib.* 60–61.

⁴² Ibid., 65; Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* II. 3, p. 252.

⁴³ *V. Petri Ib.* 70–71. On the anti-Chalcedonian unrest in Egypt, see C. W. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity: From Its Origins to 451 C.E.* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 205–15.

⁴⁴ Rufus does not specify the date of Peter's return to Palestine, but it apparently took place between the mid-sixties and early seventies of the fifth century. See *V. Petri Ib.* 69–77.

⁴⁵ On Peter as leader of his monastery at this time, see Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters*, I. 35, pp. 114–15.

⁴⁶ *V. Petri Ib.* 77.

exorcising demons, having visions, hearing heavenly voices, and entering into mystical trances. He attracted anti-Chalcedonians from all the surrounding regions and, according to Rufus, acted as a holy man for all Christians as well as for Jews and Samaritans.⁴⁷ The appeal of holy persons to a wide spectrum of clientele, exceeding religious boundaries, is not exceptional in late antique hagiography; Simon Stylites offers a famous example of this phenomenon.⁴⁸

Engaging in anti-Chalcedonian missionary activity, Peter orchestrated the resistance in the southern coastal region of Palestine. He traveled often, visiting Gaza, Jerusalem, Caesarea, and even Arabia, and later enjoyed outstanding success in attracting a circle of law students from Beirut, including Severus of Antioch and Zacharias Rhetor.⁴⁹ He also initiated the building of anti-Chalcedonian monasteries and churches.⁵⁰ When Timothy, the exiled anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria, finally returned from his long period of exile (475), he invited Peter to join him in Alexandria. Peter declined but continued to maintain contact with Timothy through letters and messengers.⁵¹ Peter's stature was appreciated by the emperor Zeno, who summoned him and his great friend and mentor Abba Isaiah to Constantinople, probably to endorse his Christological compromise, the *henoticon*, launched a few years earlier (482).⁵² But Peter evaded Zeno's order by escaping to Phoenicia.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ibid., 126–27. Lorenzo Perrone sees this as a possible example of a coexistence that developed at that time between anti-Chalcedonians and other oppressed religious minorities. See L. Perrone, “Monasticism as a Factor of Religious Interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine Period,” in Kofsky and Stroumsa (eds.), *Sharing the Sacred*, pp. 89–90. Rufus also relates the case of a young aristocratic Jewish woman from Tyre who became a devotee of Peter, a nun, and an anti-Chalcedonian abbess of a monastery in the village Aphtoria (Aphtorida in *Plerophoriae* 71, p. 126) south of Caesarea (*V. Petri Ib.* 115, 120). On this affair, see B. Rosen, “A Converted Jewess of Tyre at the Beginning of the Sixth Century C.E.,” *Cathedra* 61 (1992), pp. 54–66 (in Hebrew).

⁴⁸ Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* XXVI, 13. For the cross denominational appeal of the holy man, see D. Frankfurter, “Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003), pp. 339–85.

⁴⁹ *V. Petri Ib.* 114ff.; Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Severi*, 85–88.

⁵⁰ *V. Petri Ib.* 78.

⁵¹ Ibid., 80.

⁵² Ibid., 103. On Zeno's *Henoticon*, see S. Salaville, “L'affaire de l'Hénotique,” *Échos d'Orient* 18 (1916–1919), pp. 255–65; idem, “L'Hénotique de Zénon,” *Échos d'Orient* 18 (1916–1919), pp. 389–97.

⁵³ *V. Petri Ib.* 104; Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Isa.* 14; Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* IV, 9, p. 305. According to Honigsmann's interpretation, Peter did not escape; Zeno

John Rufus strives to portray Peter as a staunch, uncompromising fighter for the anti-Chalcedonian cause, a picture somewhat modified by Zacharias Rhetor (originally from the Gaza area),⁵⁴ who presents Peter as a more moderate Monophysite, at least from the standpoint of theology (namely, regarding the question of the essence of the body of Christ).⁵⁵ For his own reasons, Ernest Honigmann wished to moderate Rufus' depiction of Peter and portray him as a middle-of-the-road Monophysite.⁵⁶

John Rufus, the author of Peter's *vita*, also composed a tract of anti-Chalcedonian propaganda, the *Plerophoriae*.⁵⁷ In this work, based primarily on material from Palestinian sources and especially on Peter the Iberian himself, John Rufus testifies as to the nascent problematic attitude to the holy places among the defensive radical anti-Chalcedonian faction in Palestine, following the suppression of the Monophysite revolt and the later reconciliatory policy, rejected by the radicals. Rufus, in a number of anecdotes, presents the anti-Chalcedonian dilemma in a somewhat polarized, perhaps even simplistic fashion, probably reflecting his own radical position, which held that the attachment of anti-Chalcedonians to holy places under Chalcedonian domination, actually implied collaboration and communion with the archenemy of the true faith—Monophysitism.

This dilemma posited a collision between loyalty to the holy places and fidelity to the true faith. The sincere anti-Chalcedonian living in the holy places had to make the bitter choice either to abandon his attachment to and veneration of the holy places, thereby remaining true to his faith and brethren, or to retain communion with the "heretical" Chalcedonians. This dilemma is expressed in several anecdotes.

In one such tale, the priest and monk Constantine, a guardian of the tomb of John the Baptist in Sebaste during the time of the

cancelled the order, which reached Peter in Tripoli en route to Constantinople. See Honigmann, *Pierre l'Ibérien*, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Zacharias Rhetor, *V. Severi*, 88.

⁵⁵ Idem, *V. Isa.* 11.

⁵⁶ Honigmann, *Pierre l'Ibérien*, pp. 13–17. On Honigmann's attempt to identify Peter as the author of the pseudo-Dionysian writings, which may have been authored by a moderate Monophysite, see chap. 1 above.

⁵⁷ On the propagandist aspect of the visionary tales in this work see Perrone, "Dissenso dottrinale e propaganda visionaria"; Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, pp. 113–41; idem, "Heresy and Orthodoxy: The Anti-Chalcedonian Hagiography of John Rufus," in Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, pp. 89–106.

Council of Chalcedon, often had visions of the Baptist. When the repression of the anti-Chalcedonians after Chalcedon took place and the priests of the party of the patriarch Theodosius were banished by the emperor Marcian (450–457), Constantine had to decide whether to flee the communion of the apostates, and thus deprive himself of the presence of St. John, or remain in Sebaste and become an apostate himself. Constantine implored the Baptist, in his wisdom, to disclose God's will. He had a vision of the saint, who was saying: "Priest, do not lose your soul because of me and do not deny your faith. But go and guard your soul untarnished. For wherever you go, I shall be with you." And Constantine left his beloved saint and his tomb, and fled Sebaste.⁵⁸

A similar story relates that after spending time with the monks in Sinai, the anti-Chalcedonian monk Zosimus made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and later came to Bethel in search of a place of quiet retreat. Entreated by the guardian of the holy site of Jacob's dream to stay there with him, Zosimus explained that this was impossible since he was escaping the apostates of Chalcedon. The guardian assured him that this did not present a problem, and Zosimus was inclined to accept this generous offer. But one night the patriarch Jacob appeared to him, demanding: "How can you stay here, when you are orthodox (i.e., an anti-Chalcedonian) and are in communion with the orthodox? Do not betray your faith because of me, but hurry and flee from the company of the renegades and you shall not be deprived of anything." And Zosimus left the place.⁵⁹

Another story tells of an anti-Chalcedonian woman, a devotee of Saint Stephen and John the Baptist in Jerusalem, who, after Chalcedon, was hesitant to make her customary visits to their churches and pray with the oppressors. She was tormented by prospect of separation from the saints, until Stephen came to her saying: "Go, abide in your cell and you shall not lose your heritage. Do not torture yourself thinking that you are separated from us. Wherever you are we are with you and abide with you."⁶⁰

Whether authentic or anachronistic, such tales reflect the nascent ambivalence among certain radical anti-Chalcedonian circles in Palestine toward the holy places and pilgrimage to the holy places

⁵⁸ *Plerophoriae* 29, pp. 70–72.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, pp. 72–74.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 79, pp. 135–36.

in the mid-to late fifth and early sixth centuries. Such attitudes must be viewed in the larger perspective of the growing hostility between the rival camps. Statements denouncing Chalcedon as the work of the devil, the supporters of Chalcedon as the worshippers of Satan, Juvenal as the Antichrist, and similar vituperations appear throughout Rufus' works,⁶¹ to the extent that the entire empire is depicted as the root of all evil. The barbarian conquests are declared to be a punishment for the Tome of Leo and the Council of Chalcedon, and a fulfillment of the destruction prophecies of Jeremiah.⁶² Thus the Council of Chalcedon heralded, according to Rufus, the coming of the Antichrist.⁶³

Hunt has noted that "the universal veneration in which the biblical sites were held, as the visible nucleus of the faith, was potentially a uniquely influential weapon in ecclesiastical politics."⁶⁴ The political significance of the holy places, especially in Jerusalem, was already exploited in ecclesiastical politics by Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem in the mid-fourth century.⁶⁵ Writing to Juvenal, Pope Leo asserted that the holy places were the "unassailable proofs of the Catholic faith."⁶⁶ In this vein, Leo also wrote to Eudocia, who initially endorsed the anti-Chalcedonian stance, that she could not ignore the truths of the faith "where the signs of his miracles and the proofs of his sufferings proclaim that Jesus Christ is true God and true man in one person."⁶⁷ In other words, the holy places had acquired theological importance as evidence for the two-natures doctrine of Chalcedon. This position seems to have struck roots among leading Chalcedonian circles in Palestine. According to Cyril of Scythopolis a few decades later, in the time of the pro-Monophysite emperor

⁶¹ Ibid., 9, p. 22; 17, p. 34; 26, p. 67. Cyril of Scythopolis, on the other hand, calls Theodosius, the leader of the anti-Chalcedonian revolt, a proxy of the Antichrist (*V. Euthymii* 27). Such abusive utterances thus seem to characterize the writings of both camps.

⁶² *Plerophoriae* 89, pp. 150–151.

⁶³ Ibid., 89, p. 154.

⁶⁴ Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, p. 246.

⁶⁵ J. W. Drijvers, "Promoting Jerusalem: Cyril and the True Cross," in Jan W. Drijvers and John W. Watt (eds.), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 79–95.

⁶⁶ *Ep.* 139, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, 4, 92. ed. E. Schwartz (Berlin-Leipzig, 1932).

⁶⁷ *Ep.* 123, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, 4, 77; Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, p. 246; Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, p. 169.

Anastasius (491–518), Sabas and Theodosius, the leaders of desert monasticism, sent a petition to the emperor against the anti-Chalcedonians and against appointing an anti-Chalcedonian patriarch in Jerusalem. In this petition the two monastic leaders claimed that through the Holy Cross, the Church of the Anastasis, and other holy places, Christian inhabitants of the Holy Land received the correct faith—namely, the faith in its Chalcedonian formulation. Moreover, the inhabitants of the Holy Land touch the truth daily with their very hands through the holy places where the incarnation of the saviour took place. Domination of the holy places is now conceived of as guaranteeing the survival of the right faith, the diphysite Chalcedonian belief, and even the rule of a Chalcedonian emperor. Hence it is better, wrote Sabas and Theodosius, that the holy places should go up in fire rather than be handed over to the heretical anti-Chalcedonians, because there is no value to these places unless they are in the hands of the people of the right faith.⁶⁸ The relative theological value of the holy places—dependent on their possession by the right side in the conflict—emerges clearly in these acrimonious declarations.

Against this background we can better understand John Rufus' radical pronouncement that with the expulsion of the anti-Chalcedonians from the churches the Holy Spirit had departed with them and the Antichrist had entered together with the heretics!⁶⁹ In his *Church History*, Zacharias Rhetor stated that when the Monophysites were expelled from Palestine and Peter the Iberian stayed because of his exemption by the emperor and his wife, Jesus appeared to him in a vision, saying: "How now Peter! Am I being expelled in my believing servants, and you are remaining quiet and at rest?" Then Peter repented and joined those who were expelled.⁷⁰

With regard to the holy places, the Chalcedonians themselves had apparently contributed to the situation. John Rufus tells the story of the anti-Chalcedonian Urbicia, a diaconess and daughter of a bishop from Crete, and her brother Euphrasius, who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and bought a monastery near the Church of the Ascension.

⁶⁸ Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Sabae* 57. For a discussion of the theological concept of the holy places reflected in this petition, see Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, pp. 167–69; Flusin, "L'hagiographie palestinienne," pp. 28–30.

⁶⁹ *Plerophoriae* 93, p. 160 (appendix).

⁷⁰ Zacharias Rhetor, *Hist. Eccl.* 3, 7.

There they received the pilgrim priest Epiphanius from Pamphilia (after the antiencyclical of Basiliscus in 476). But since they refused to take communion with the patriarch, and given the failure of attempts at conciliation by the governor of Jerusalem, they were expelled from the city.⁷¹ John Moschus recounts similar stories of a later period (sixth and early seventh centuries) about anti-Chalcedonians who were refused access to the Church of the Anastasis and the Holy Sepulchre.⁷² A precedent to these cases may be seen in the excommunication of Jerome by the Jerusalem Church (393), which lasted three years and included a proscription on entrance to the Church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.⁷³ The incidents recounted by Moschus may reflect a tendency to ban avowed Monophysites from the holy sites. On the other hand, it seems that radical anti-Chalcedonians disapproved of their peers who worshipped with Chalcedonians at the holy places. On a visit to the Church of the Ascension, a pilgrim nun staying on the Mount of Olives is reported to have found herself incidentally in the closed church during a service of Chalcedonians. A long time later, on her deathbed, she was tormented by remorse that collaboration with the sinners prevented her from dying as a faithful anti-Chalcedonian.⁷⁴

The bitter reaction against Chalcedon in Palestine may also have aroused a tendency to denigrate the holy places, especially those in Jerusalem, which became identified with the hateful figure of Juvenal. It was said of Juvenal that he turned Jerusalem into a den of thieves and filled it with fornicators.⁷⁵ To illustrate the deterioration of the holy places under Juvenal and the Chalcedonians, it was related that during Juvenal's tenure, though prior to Chalcedon, a priest of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had fornicated with a woman after prayers, in a room above the church, where they were discovered the following morning. This event caused Gerontius, the abbot of Melania's monastery on Mount of Olives, to fast for two days in

⁷¹ *Plerophoriae* 44, pp. 94–97.

⁷² John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, PG 87/3, cols. 2904–5. See also H. Chadwick, "John Moschus and His Friend Sophronius the Sophist," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 25 (1974), p. 70.

⁷³ Jerome, *Contra Iohannem Hierosolymitanum* 42, PL 23, 394a.

⁷⁴ *Plerophoriae* 80, pp. 136–137.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 18, p. 36.

advance whenever he had to officiate at vespers in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Rufus attributed this story to Peter the Iberian.⁷⁶

Let us now return to Peter the Iberian. The *vita* tells us that in his old age, his body weakened from a rigorous ascetic regime, he went to Arabia to be cured in the hot springs of Livias. This trip became a pilgrimage tour in this part of Transjordan.⁷⁷ John Rufus himself accompanied Peter on that journey and attested to the many miracles and healings that proved the holiness of the site.⁷⁸ Here we encounter Peter and his circle participating in an act of pilgrimage with all its paraphernalia, without reservation. This may be explained by the fact that the area was not specifically identified as being under heterodox Chalcedonians; it may further indicate that the new sensitivity toward the holy places and pilgrimage focused on the Chalcedonian domination and had not become opposition to pilgrimage in principle.

On their way back to the coast, Peter and his companions were invited by the tribune Elias, a long-time admirer of Peter who lived in Jerusalem and had been in the service of Eudocia, to spend the hot summer in his village (Beit Thafsha), five miles north of Jerusalem.⁷⁹ Peter accepted the invitation.⁸⁰ Heading back to the coast a disputation developed among some of the disciples: How was it that during the entire summer Peter had not cared to visit Jerusalem, the holy places, and particularly Calvary and the Tomb, even by night, when he was so close to the city?

One of the monks answered: On the night before the departure, he had had an amazing vision. Peter appeared to him and took him by the hand on a typical holy route in the holy city and its environment visiting the famous holy sites of that period.⁸¹ The account of this vision convinced the disaffected disciples that their master had indeed prayed to the Lord in all of the holy places, in his spirit, every day and even every hour. In support, John Rufus adduces Pauline verses emphasizing the nearness to Christ in spirit wherever one is.⁸² This story reflects the anti-Chalcedonian dilemma regarding

⁷⁶ Ibid., 41. p. 92.

⁷⁷ *V. Petri Ib.* 83.

⁷⁸ *V. Petri Ib.* 83–89.

⁷⁹ The place is unidentified. See Tsafir et al., *Tabula Imperii Romani*, p. 86.

⁸⁰ *V. Petri Ib.* 97–98.

⁸¹ For a discussion of this account, see chap. 3.

⁸² *V. Petri Ib.* 98–100.

the holy places under Chalcedonian domination: Peter avoided visiting Jerusalem and the holy sites, and his avoidance was subject to criticism on the part of some of his disciples. The significance of the vision lies in its transformation of the idea of pilgrimage to the holy places into a spiritual one. Notable here is that the holy places do not lose their inherent theological value; the visionary tour of the holy sites follows the typical route of a Byzantine pilgrim to Jerusalem. Symbolically, the holy places continue to serve as foci in Rufus' account of Peter's spiritual pilgrimage. Their practical and physical significance, however, had been diminished.⁸³ Yet it is difficult to discern here the explicit ideal of spiritual pilgrimage prevalent in later medieval literature.

This story seems to conform to John Rufus' description of Peter's last years. Here Rufus presents his hero as realizing in a larger context the monastic ideal of *xeniteia*—the life of separation and detachment, not only from holy places but from any place of sedentary life that constitutes a mode of attachment to this world, even a monastery. According to John Rufus, in light of this ideal Peter refused to return to his old monastery between Gaza and Maiuma to spend his last days peacefully. He wanted to end his life as a "stranger" to this world and to receive the crown of *xeniteia*.⁸⁴

Peter the Iberian had come a long way. His personal experiences combined with historical events, as related by his devoted disciple John Rufus, had transformed him from a young enthusiastic pilgrim, devotee of holy relics and places, into a model advocate of the ideal of *xeniteia*—the holy man, a wandering stranger, beyond attachment to the physical, transitory world, even that of relics and holy places. His life story also exemplifies the plight of the anti-Chalcedonians in the Holy Land in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon.

⁸³ On anti-Chalcedonian attitudes to the holy places following Chalcedon, see also L. Perrone, "Christian Holy Places and Pilgrimage in an Age of Dogmatic Conflicts: Popular Religion and Confessional Affiliation in Byzantine Palestine (Fifth to Seventh Centuries)," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 48 (1998), pp. 5–37.

⁸⁴ *V. Petri Ib.* 122.

CHAPTER THREE

PETER THE IBERIAN: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MOSES

When John Rufus set out at the end of the fifth century or beginning of the sixth to write the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, Greek hagiographic compositions were easily available.¹ Indeed the author, in a sense, followed a standard pattern of account, describing Peter's ancestry, his education, his character, important events in his life, his travels, his doctrines, his death, and his heirs. Peter was depicted as an enthusiastic pilgrim, a zealous monk, a dynamic bishop, a holy man, and an anti-Chalcedonian leader. Likewise, the criteria of sanctity in this *vita* are those common in hagiography: asceticism, the working of miracles, the power of discernment (*diakrisis*), and freedom of speech (*parrêsia*).² However, John Rufus' goal was not merely to write an eloquent hagiographic treatise; rather, his narrative aims to be a propagandist composition in hagiographic dress, merging the hero's life with the religious controversy that ensued after the Council of Chalcedon. Yet his persistent interest in anti-Chalcedonian propaganda—to which a few years later he devoted his composition the *Plerophoriae*—did not interfere with his interest in history or in details. The text does describe the life of Peter and his *politeia*, but all the while it promotes his religious inclinations.³

Despite theological controversy being foregrounded in the *vita*, its idiosyncrasy resides in two particular features: the interpretation of Peter's activities throughout the *vita* in light of the biblical Moses, and the relatively detailed accounts of the hero's pilgrimages. These two peculiarities, especially the use of Moses as the icon of the *vita*, served the religious orientation that guided the author—namely, the

¹ On John Rufus, see Schwartz, *Johannes Rufus, ein monophysitischer Schriftsteller*; Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*; idem, "Heresy and Orthodoxy: The Anti-Chalcedonian Hagiography of John Rufus."

² See, for example, Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l'oeuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis*; P. Cox Miller, "Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy," in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000), pp. 209–54.

³ For the use of hagiography as a weapon in the Christological controversy in Palestine, see Flusin, "L'hagiographie palestinienne."

anti-Chalcedonian stance—and his general tendency to praise and laud Peter as “that minister of God and fellow in zeal of the great Moses,”⁴ as one adhering firmly to orthodoxy, i.e., the anti-Chalcedonian faith.

When he [Peter] had advanced in age and spiritual love, and was adding every day to the grace of divine fire, and was placing ascent in his heart . . . he longed to go far from the world and its vanity, and run to that first of virtues which is *aksenaiutha*.⁵

It seems that Peter's objective in undertaking the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the year 437/8, described in the opening lines of his *vita*—namely, the realization of *aksenaiutha* (Greek *xeniteia*)—was ardently shared by the monks flocking to the holy sites in Palestine from the fourth century on. The ideal of *xeniteia*, prevalent in monastic culture—a life of self-imposed exile, voluntary alienation and wandering, separation from family, and detachment from all social relationships—aims at spiritual progress. The very essence of *xeniteia* is the perception of the monk as stranger—in both a physical and a spiritual sense.⁶ From the fourth century on, an explicit affinity is noticeable in monastic culture between the phenomenon of pilgrimage and the realization of *xeniteia*. Of special interest are those instances in which holy sites and the Holy Land were chosen as the setting for achieving these ideals.⁷ In the *Life of Peter the Iberian* the juxtaposition of monastic *politeia* and the ideal of *xeniteia* near the holy places in Palestine is wholly evident. In late antiquity, voluntary exile and wanderings had affected monastic life and aroused controversy among Church and ascetic leaders, as well as among ordinary monks.⁸

⁴ *V. Petri Ib.* 70–71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶ See Guillaume, “Le dépaysement comme forme d'ascèse dans le monachisme ancien.” See also, B. Bitton-Ashkelony, “Pilgrimage in Monastic Culture in Late Antiquity,” in M. Stone, R. Ervine, and N. Stone (eds.), *The Armenians in Jerusalem and the Holy Land* (Leuven, 2002), pp. 1–17. For a thorough discussion of the phenomenon of wandering monks in its social, economic, and ecclesiastical contexts, see D. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2002), pp. 19–82.

⁷ On this affinity, see Bitton-Ashkelony, “Pilgrimage in Monastic Culture.”

⁸ Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*; D. Brakke, “‘Outside the Places, Within the Truth’: Athanasius of Alexandria and the Localization of the Holy,” in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 445–81; S. Elm, “Athanasius of Alexandria's Letter to the Virgins: Who was its Intended Audience?” *Augustinianum* 33 (1993), pp. 171–83; G. E. Gould, “Moving On and Staying Put in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*,” *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989), pp. 231–37.

However, in the *Life of Peter the Iberian* scarcely any ambivalence or reservation about the act of voluntary exile is discernible. On the contrary, the author represented it as the culmination of the hero's ambitions—to achieve the crown of *aksenaiutha*.⁹

Four threads depicting pilgrimage and the discovery of a holy tomb are interwoven in the *Life of Peter*: a description of Peter and his companion entering Jerusalem, the visit to Mount Nebo, the *inventio* of the tomb of Moses at Mount Nebo, and the dream journey to the sacred sites in Jerusalem and its environs.¹⁰ Certainly, by the time Peter the Iberian and his entourage were overwhelmed by the vision of the glistening roofs of the churches of Jerusalem and “fell on their faces and advanced on their knees until they entered the city,”¹¹ pilgrimage to the Holy Land had already been rooted in Christian society for over a hundred years.¹² These four episodes, however, reflect the flourishing fashion of sacred mobility, the emergence of Christian religious landscape, and the existence of a well-defined route for pilgrims—the “Holy Route” (*rehta qadisha*)¹³ was the term coined by John Rufus, an expression not used until then—and they add important information on holy sites not otherwise known. Nevertheless, the author's aim in including these passages in the *vita* was not to provide the reader with historical information about the route of fifth-century devotee pilgrims. What, then, was John Rufus' motive in choosing to portray Peter as an enthusiastic pilgrim realizing his *aksenaiutha* in the Holy Land?¹⁴ After all, in Rufus' account Peter was not simply following the fashion of aristocratic Christians

⁹ *V. Petri Ib.* 122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26–27, 82–85, 87–89, 98–100. For a French translation of these passages, see P. Maraval, *Récits des premiers pèlerins chrétiens au Proche-Orient (IV^e–VII^e siècle)* (Paris, 1996), pp. 164–68. For an English translation of the visit to Mount Nebo and the dream journey, see J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 57–58.

¹¹ *V. Petri Ib.* 26.

¹² The bibliography on pilgrimage in late antiquity is vast. See, for example Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire*; P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient: Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe* (Paris, 1985); G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000); L. Perrone, “Christian Holy Places and Pilgrimage in an Age of Dogmatic Conflicts”; D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*; B. Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2005).

¹³ *V. Petri Ib.* 99.

¹⁴ On Peter as a pilgrim, see chap. 2, above.

to travel to the Holy Land; the accounts of pilgrimage in this *vita* are not innocent. Can we identify the deliberate tactic of the author and unveil the purpose of these descriptions in the *vita*?¹⁵

The second pivotal motif in the *Life of Peter* is the *imitatio Mosis*. The biographer organized the *vita* around a parade of allusions to and images of Moses, and pictured Peter as nothing less than “the Second Moses.”¹⁶ He intensified the biblical tone of the narrative by glossing stories about Peter’s miracles and favouring those in which Peter acted like Moses. For instance, in describing the disastrous burning of shelters of dry reeds in the valley of Baar during the summer, we read that Peter “stood up before them all and stretched up his hands to heaven. And while his mouth was silent, in his heart he was crying, like Moses to God.”¹⁷ During the great drought in Madaba, Peter performed a miracle and an abundance of rain came down. Rufus recounted that all the people then came to embrace the saint:

Calling him a second Elijah and Moses—the former as one who opened the heavens after three years’ lack of rain, the latter as one who brought forth water from the rock to those endangered by thirst. It was the time also that increased the wonder: for it was a few days before Pentecost. So with love and faith they ran to him, and listened to these teachings inspired by God, so that many gladly obeyed the preaching of the orthodox faith . . . and became our fellows and brothers, of one faith with us, and zealous for the completion of the Church.¹⁸

There was nothing new, of course, in John Rufus’ tactic of representing a character in terms of a biblical figure such as a prophet.¹⁹

¹⁵ In analyzing this *vita* we have been influenced by Cox Miller, “Strategies of Representation.”

¹⁶ *V. Petri Ib.* 90, 127. Rufus also presents Peter as new Paul, Noah, and Elijah.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 92–93. On recounting miracles for the purpose of commending orthodoxy, see S. Griffith, “The Signs and Wonders of Orthodoxy: Miracles and Monks’ Lives in Sixth-Century Palestine,” in J. C. Cavadini (ed.), *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth* (Notre Dame, 1999), pp. 139–68.

¹⁸ *V. Petri Ib.*, 90.

¹⁹ On this tactic, see D. Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine: Reassessing the Lives of the Prophets* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 97–105. For the application of Moses typology to Constantine in Eusebius’ writings, see for instance, *Vita Constantini* I. 12.1–2; II. 12 with A. Cameron and S. G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 192–93; M. Hollerich, “The Comparison of Moses and Constantine in Eusebius of Caesarea’s Life of Constantine,” *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989), pp. 80–95; A. Cameron, “Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine,” in M. J. Edwards and S. Swain

His choice of Moses in a monastic context is neither surprising nor unique; Moses is a model of asceticism, fasting, humility, and perfection.²⁰ Yet, as we shall see, Rufus goes beyond those classical traits of Moses. It is noteworthy that conjuring up the image of Moses in late antique pilgrimage accounts was rare in comparison with that of Abraham—the biblical prototype for a pilgrim monk in late antique hagiography—someone who was exiled from his land and birthplace and was characterized as having fully achieved the ideal of *xeniteia* in the Holy Land.²¹ Apparently the author's goal was not only to promote a realization of the ideal of *aksenaiutha* in his hero and identify him with the figure of the perfect stranger seeking a new homeland. In his attempt to bestow approval on the hero's religious identity, Rufus was also striving to find a symbol of orthodoxy, an ultimate icon of a man of God holding the true faith. This aim explains the author's selection of Moses from the gallery of biblical figures who usually peopled the hagiographic compositions. The author was not interested in borrowing from the multiple portrayals of Moses prevailing in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman worlds the image of the philosopher. Rather, he focused on images of Moses as "the great legislator and prophet,"²² the one who received the divine Law directly from God and possessed the divine truth,²³ the messenger and shepherd, the most appropriate mediator between the two worlds,²⁴ and

(eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 145–74.

²⁰ See, for example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* II, 8,13; VI, 8; XXVI, 2.

²¹ See, for example, the case of the Cappadocian monk Theognius, who arrived in 455 in Jerusalem and is described by Paul of Elusa as a pilgrim who wished to imitate Abraham. See *Acta S. Theognii* 10, ed. J. van den Gheyn, *Analecta Bollandiana* 10 (1891), pp. 82–83. See also S. Vaillhé, "Saint Théognius, Evêque de Béthélie," *Echos d'Orient* 1 (1897/8), pp. 380–82. This passage is discussed in Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, p. 165. See also E. Lanne, "La *xeniteia* d'Abraham dans l'oeuvre d'Irenée: Aux origines du thème monastique de la *peregrinatio*," *Irénikon* 47 (1974), pp. 163–87.

²² *Plerophoriae* 55, p. 110. For these images of Moses, see J. G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville, 1972). D. T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* (Assen and Minneapolis, 1993); A. C. Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Mosis*. Brown Judaic Studies (Providence, 2002).

²³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* I, 23–29, ed. O. Stählin (Berlin, 1960), pp. 93–112; P. M. Guillaume, "Moïse," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris, 1980), cols. 1453–71. See also the collective volume *Moïse: L'homme de l'alliance* (Paris, 1955).

²⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *In psalmorum inscriptiones* VII.14, ed. and trans. J. Reynard, SC 466 (Paris, 2002), p. 208. On Moses as mediator, see also S. J. Hafemann, "Moses in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: A Survey," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 7 (1990), pp. 79–104.

the perfect pedagogue to lead the people toward God,²⁵ and an ideal bishop and model of monk-bishop.²⁶ All these images—already inherent in Christianity—served John Rufus' theological and ecclesiastical purposes very well, and fitted the religious picture he was endeavouring to create. His impulse in writing a propagandist composition was strengthened by using the strategy of *imitatio Mosis*. John Rufus—probably one of the earliest anti-Chalcedonian hagiographic authors—was not merely writing a chapter in the monastic history of fifth-century Palestine; he was, first and foremost, creating a literary space in which to promote the anti-Chalcedonian faith in its full historical setting during one of its turbulent phases. The tone of this stance is set in the introductory statement of the *vita*, concerning Peter's name:

His name at first was Nabarnugius. But when he was judged worthy of the holy habit of monks, then his name was changed to Peter, after the name of the chief of the Apostles. Those fathers who bestowed on him the holy habit were perhaps, as I think, moved by divine inspiration, because he was going to emulate in his conduct and character the boldness of his faith which had been given to him by God, for which reason also our Lord named him Peter—that is to say, the rock, and on this rock founded the Orthodox Church.²⁷

One of the strategies of representation the author adopted is that of the hero's sacred journey. Peter's travels and pilgrimages are described not merely to construct his career and authority—as was usually the case in hagiographic literature²⁸—but as journeys toward his religious identity, that is, his anti-Chalcedonian faith.²⁹ Thus the goal

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogue* 1, 58, 60, ed. M. Marcovich, *Clementis Alexandrini: Paedagogus* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 36–38; Guillaume, “Moïse,” cols. 1465–66.

²⁶ See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, *Encomium on Basil*, ed. W. Jaeger, H. Langerbeck, and H. Dörrie, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* X.I.2.127–129 (Leiden, 1990); idem, *Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, ed. G. Heil, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* X.I.2.3–57. On the ideal of ecclesiastical leadership and the comparison with Moses in the Cappadocian writings, see M. Harl, “Moïse figure de l'évêque dans l'éloge de Basile de Grégoire de Nyse (381),” in A. Spira (ed.), *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), pp. 71–119; A. Sterk, “On Basil, Moses, and the Model Bishop: The Cappadocian Legacy of Leadership,” *Church History* 67:2 (1998), pp. 227–53.

²⁷ *V. Petri* *Ib.* 4.

²⁸ On this function of the journey in hagiographic literature, see Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, pp. 113–19, 145–48.

²⁹ For pilgrimage as a journey toward a new identity, see J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (London, 1997), pp. 125–31.

of Peter's *aksennaiutha*—the voluntary exile he imposed on himself, escaping from Constantinople, and setting out for the holy city of Jerusalem—marked the first steps of a journey toward his new identity. By drawing a parallel between Moses and Peter, and in some cases even merging the two, Rufus established the authority and credibility needed to underpin the hero's anti-Chalcedonian position. This motif is first introduced at the beginning of Peter's journey to Jerusalem by evoking the image of Moses as the leader of the Exodus. From the outset Peter was named the Second Moses, and his departure from Constantinople was depicted as paralleling the Exodus from Egypt. Like the Children of Israel, Peter too escaped from his country and set off for the Promised Land. According to Rufus, God saved Peter in his way "as He once snatched Israel from the tyranny of the Egyptians and brought them into the Promised Land."³⁰ The author tells us that Peter and his friend John the Eunuch had with them on their journey to Palestine the relics of martyrs, "who were their guardians and companions, carrying their precious bones in a little golden reliquary, as the great Moses carried the Ark of God with the cherubim."³¹ Rufus explicitly stated that like the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud that had gone before the children of Israel in their travels in the desert (Exod. 14:19–20), the martyrs' relics protected Peter and his entourage and brought them safely to Jerusalem;³² and the author stressed here that the words of Moses: "As an eagle protects its nest and cherishes its young" (Deut. 32:11), fitted them.³³ Peter's "Exodus" reached its culmination and end with his entry into the holy city—Jerusalem.

Entering Jerusalem

When they were near Jerusalem, the holy city which they desired, and saw from a height opposite it at a distance of five stadia, like the fleshing of the sunrise, the lofty roofs of the holy churches, of the saving and worshipful cross of the holy Anastasis, and of the worshipful Ascension on the mountain opposite, they cried out aloud, fulfilling the prophetic words, "Look on Zion, the city of our salvation, your eyes shall see Jerusalem" (Isa. 33:20 LXX). And they raised glory and

³⁰ *V. Petri Ib.* 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³² *Ibid.*, 22.

³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

thanks with all their might to the Christ whom they loved, who had called them and brought them out and guided and preserved them; and casting themselves down on their faces, they ceased not worship from that height, and creeping on their knees, continually with their lips and their eyes, greeting this Holy Land, to proclaim the love that was burning within them, until they were within the holy walls, and embraced the base of the precious cross, that is to say holy Golgotha, and the holy Anastasis, at once seeing and weeping and confessing and glorifying and exulting, as if now they had received Jesus whom they loved, and were dwelling with him.³⁴

After describing Peter's activity in the monastic community of the Mount of Olives, Rufus reminds the readers of his promise to recount how Peter moved from Jerusalem and went to dwell in the region of Gaza, and "how he was counted meet for the priesthood, and finally the high-priesthood, by election of divine Grace."³⁵ But at this point he unexpectedly deviates from his chronological account of Peter's career and inserts into the *vita* a lengthy and detailed traditional account of Helena's discovery of the Cross and the building of the church of the Anastasis:³⁶

Blessed Helena . . . Having first traced down and found by divine help the saving wood of the precious cross, she set it for worship and for healings of souls and bodies for all the world for the sake of which He had been crucified. After this she raised up to our Lord great and God-befitting houses, and beautiful sanctuaries, over the divine Sepulchre of our Lord, and in the holy Place of the Skull, worshipful Golgotha, which is the true Holy of Holies, and true altar which from of old was proclaimed and prefigured by the prophet Moses, of stones uncut and unworked, constituted by nature. For what other is there such, but this altar alone, as in truth the altar of the indivisible Christ, and receiving no cutting nor division, whereon the true Lamb of God was sacrificed and offered, who takes away the sin of the world.³⁷

Rufus' detour into Helena's exploit, carefully crafted, is important for several reasons. First, Rufus was depicting the Golgotha in terminology reminiscent of the anti-Chalcedonian doctrine, articulating

³⁴ Ibid., 26–27.

³⁵ Ibid., 37.

³⁶ For the early traditions on the finding of the cross, see J. W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden, 1991); S. Borgenhammar, *How The Holy Cross Was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend* (Stockholm, 1991).

³⁷ *V. Petri Ib.*, 37–38.

his belief system and thus representing it as a place imbued with anti-Chalcedonian meanings. Second, Moses, the icon of the *vita* is not simply the prefiguration of Jesus;³⁸ rather, the instruction he received from God concerning the building of the altar (Ex. 20, 25) with stones “uncut and unworked” are a prefiguration of the Golgotha, the “Holy of Holies.”³⁹ In other words, by rewriting Helena’s well-known deeds in a new language—borrowed from the ancient Jewish Temple, “Holy of Holies,” and from the biblical terminology of the rule given to Moses—Rufus was proclaiming the indivisibility of Christ and thereby “baptising” the Golgotha with the anti-Chalcedonian creed. And it is precisely in this “Holy of Holies” that we shall see Peter in action: Immediately after Helena’s story, Rufus introduces into the *vita* miracles “which by reason of his divine power [the Cross] came to pass before the blessed man [Peter] for the glory of God and the assurance of the hope of Christians, and support and confirmation of our faith.”⁴⁰ One of these miracle stories recounts that a rash broke out on the face of John the Eunuch, and Peter went with him at night to the church of the Anastasis, where they prayed all night in a quiet and hidden place at the northern end of the church. At the end of the praying John saw a hand clean his face and he was healed.⁴¹ Bearing in mind that the *vita* is above all a work of apologetics, we should not reduce this story of a healing miracle to the general aim of the author to portray Peter as a holy man and miracle worker. For scenes of miracles in the Anastasis were extremely rare at that time.⁴² This miracle, remarkably *mis-en-scène*, is presented within the framework of the struggle over the orthodox faith and served as a warrant for the hero’s doctrine. John Rufus himself maintains that he describes the miracles in order to “support and affirm our faith.”⁴³ Moreover, Rufus was stressing the

³⁸ See, for example, the sixteen instances in which the career of Jesus corresponded to that of Moses in Eusebius’ *Demonstratio Evangelica* discussed by J. E. Bruns, “The ‘Agreement of Moses and Jesus’ in the *Demonstratio Evangelica* of Eusebius,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 31 (1977), pp. 117–25.

³⁹ Cf. Deut. 27, 5–6; Jos. 8, 31. On the concept of the *Anastasis* as substitute for the temple of Solomon, see, for example, Egeria, *Travels* 48.

⁴⁰ *V. Petri Ib.*, 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴² Jerome alludes to miracles in the Anastasis, *Ep.* 46.8, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL (Vienna, 1996), pp. 338–9.

⁴³ *V. Petri Ib.*, 38.

unbroken continuity between the glorious past and the individual present, between the discovery of the Cross by Helena to Peter, the bearer of the Cross.⁴⁴ We have been told that while Peter was still a child in the palace of Theodosius he had received a portion of the Cross and used to work miracles through it,⁴⁵ and he carried it with him during his travel to Palestine.⁴⁶ Establishing Peter's own line to the past, enables Rufus to place his anti-Chalcedonian hero in a wide and honored context, that of the history of Christian salvation gained and symbolized by the Cross.

At one critical point in the *vita* Rufus portrays his hero on a journey to a vital site in the drama of Moses' life—Mount Nebo. This journey took place in the 480s, a few years after Peter's return from political exile in Egypt,⁴⁷ after his reputation as an anti-Chalcedonian holy man was well established. The reason for this journey was apparently quite prosaic: he traveled to the city of Livias, known for its hot springs, "named after holy Moses,"⁴⁸ seeking relief from his ailments.⁴⁹ The biographer divides this account into two stages: First, during the journey to Livias, he gives a detailed description of the pilgrimage to Mount Nebo; he then goes on to tell the story of discovering the tomb of Moses.

The Pilgrimage to Mount Nebo

The next day we made our way past Madaba and midway came to the holy mountain of Moses called Avarim or Pisgah, the place where God told him "Ascend and die." There is a great worshipful sanctuary in the name of the prophet, and many monasteries were built around it.⁵⁰ In joy at visiting the place with the old man [Peter], we raised prayers of thanksgiving to God, who had honoured us with the blessing and veneration of such a prophet. And when we came there after prayer and worship, the old man [Peter] led us to a small cell, about five cubits broad and long, and not well lit and he told us and said: "I remember when I was a boy, and had newly come from the

⁴⁴ For Peter as the bearer of the Cross, see *ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 58–71.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 83. Antoninus also refers to these as Moses' springs and says that lepers are there cleansed. See *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini* 10, ed. C. Milani (Milan, 1977).

⁴⁹ *V. Petri Ib.* 84.

⁵⁰ On the church on Mount Nebo, see Maraval, *Lieux saints*, pp. 282–83.

royal city [Constantinople], I arrived at this mountain for the sight⁵¹ and for prayer, and hearing that one of the great saints of Scetis was dwelling here in quiet and solitude,⁵² he who had left Scetis with all the monks who were there when the invasion of the Mazices fell upon the monasteries there. I persuaded the guardian of the mountain that I might be honoured with the blessing and sight of him. It was this very cell that you see, in which this blessed man was living for forty years, not going out of the door or across the threshold; he was abstemious and a prophet and filled with divine grace.” Then three of us came [into the cell of the saint]: myself, my blessed John,⁵³ and another man, a monk of Cappadocia, who was travelling with us.⁵⁴

In what follows, John Rufus describes at length Peter’s intimate conversation with the holy recluse, thus providing the reader with a decisive clue for understanding the function of this account of pilgrimage in the *vita*.

And when I [Peter] turned round to him, he indicated to me with his hand that I should remain, while he left the others to go out . . . He foresaw in the Spirit and was making known the gift of the priesthood with which I was going to be honoured.”⁵⁵

This prophecy about Peter’s ordination, reminiscent of God’s election of Moses at Mount Sinai, had been proclaimed on Mount Nebo when Peter was still a youth, immediately after escaping Constantinople. Rufus could find no better arena for Peter’s being chosen as a priest and confirming his faith than “the holy Mountain of Moses.”⁵⁶ Rufus then recounts, in the classic manner of *inventio* prevailing at the period, the discovering of Moses’ tomb, hence providing for the first time the detailed and full testimony of this *inventio*.

⁵¹ For this pilgrim’s goal, see, for example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* IX.2. The visibility in pilgrims’ accounts of the Holy Land is discussed in Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, pp. 102–33.

⁵² *Shelia* is the parallel term in Syriac to ἡσυχία. On the different meaning of ἡσυχία, see I. Hausherr, “L’hésychasme. Etude de spiritualité,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 22 (1956), pp. 5–40, 247–85 (= idem, *Hésychasme et Prière*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 176, Rome, 1966, pp. 163–237); K. Ware, “Silence in Prayer: The Meaning of *Hesychia*,” in B. Pennington (ed.), *One Yet Two Monastic Traditions East and West* (Kalamazoo, 1976), pp. 22–47.

⁵³ John the Eunuch, companion and spiritual guide of Peter the Iberian, see *V. Petri Ib.* 21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 85–86.

⁵⁵ *V. Petri Ib.* 86. On the use of the image of Moses on the mountain as an example of one who is prepared for leadership, see also Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 2.92, 20.2, 32.16–17; Sterk, “Basil, Moses, and the Model Bishop,” p. 241.

⁵⁶ *V. Petri Ib.* 85. For Peter’s ordination, see *ibid.*, 51.

Before discussing this *inventio* it is worth recalling that the enigmatic death of Moses and the riddle of his burial place: “but no one knows his burial place until this very day” (Deut. 34:6) has aroused immense curiosity among Jewish and Christian writers; an important corpus of traditions was woven around it from the first century on.⁵⁷ Some have declared that Moses never died;⁵⁸ others have imagined his ascent to heaven and disappearance in the clouds, rejecting the view that Moses had been bodily removed from the earth and transferred to heaven⁵⁹ and stressing that only his soul was surrendered to God.⁶⁰ For Philo of Alexandria—who considered Moses to be a king, lawgiver, high priest, and prophet⁶¹—Moses “was buried with none present, surely by no mortal hands but by immortal powers.”⁶² Clement of Alexandria speaks of a “double Moses” to avoid using “body and soul”: “Joshua, the son of Nun, saw a double Moses being taken away, one who went with the angels and the other who was deemed worthy to be buried in the ravines.”⁶³

The *Assumption of Moses*, most probably originating in Palestine and written in Hebrew or Aramaic in the first quarter of the first century,⁶⁴ featured Moses and Joshua in a dialogue on the occasion of Moses’ impending death. It is conceivable that the *Assumption of Moses*

⁵⁷ For these traditions, see S. E. Loewenstamm, “The Death of Moses,” in G. W. E. Nickelsburg (ed.), *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (Missoula, 1976), pp. 185–217; J. Goldin, “The Death of Moses: An Exercise in Midrashic Transposition,” in J. H. Marks and R. M. Good (eds.), *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (Guilford, 1987), pp. 219–25. On the death of Moses in the Rabbinic Haggada, see W. K. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 209–11.

⁵⁸ *b. Sotah* 13b.

⁵⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 4.8,48.

⁶⁰ For example, *Sifre on Deuteronomy* 326–27, ed. L. Finkelstein (New York, 1969); *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* 12, ed. S. Schechter (New York, 1967). For the various sources on Moses’ dispute with the angel of death for his soul, see E. Glickler-Chazon, “Moses’ Struggle for his Soul: A Prototype for the *Testament of Abraham*, the Greek *Apocalypse of Ezra*, and the *Apocalypse of Sedrach*,” *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1985/86), pp. 151–64.

⁶¹ For these images of Moses, see Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism*; Guillaume, “Moïse”; Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, pp. 100–31.

⁶² Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II, 291, text and Eng. trans. F. H. Colson, LCL (London, 1935), VI, p. 594.

⁶³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* VI.132.2; Origen, *In Jesu Nave* II.1, ed. and trans. A. Jaubert, SC 71 (Paris, 1960), pp. 116–19.

⁶⁴ As convincingly argued by J. Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary* (Leiden, 1993), esp. pp. 115–23.

ended with his death and burial, but the ending has not come down to us.⁶⁵ All we have are Joshua's words:

What place will receive you or what will be the monument on your grave, or who, being human, will dare to carry your body from one place to another? For all who die when their time has come have a grave in the earth. But your grave extends from the East to the West, and from the North to the extreme South. The entire world is your grave.⁶⁶

The Epistle of Jude (Jude 9), dating to the end of the first century, says that the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed with him over the body of Moses,⁶⁷ a tradition that probably goes back to the lost ending of the *Assumption of Moses*.⁶⁸ The same thread is apparent in the Armenian apocryphal tradition: "And Moses the servant of God died and they buried him [and the angel buried him (B)]."⁶⁹

A new element subsequently permeated the tradition of the angelic burial—namely, the geographical location of this event. Such a tradition appears in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (Deut. 34:1): The ministering angels, Michael and Gabriel, prepared a golden bed inlaid with precious stones, and angels of wisdom laid Moses on the bed and by their word carried him four miles and buried him in the valley opposite Beit Pe'or.⁷⁰ Similarly, in the *Life of Moses* included in one cycle of the Armenian version of *Vitae Prophetarum*, the angel appears as the one responsible for taking Moses' soul on Mount Nebo.⁷¹ Yet when Eusebius wrote his *Onomastikon* around the end of the third century he was not aware of any tradition pertaining to the tomb of Moses on Mount Nebo. Neither did Epiphanius, who related to

⁶⁵ For a reconstruction of the lost ending of *The Assumption of Moses*, which probably contained an account of Moses' death, see Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses*, pp. 270–85.

⁶⁶ *The Assumption of Moses* 11:5, pp. 20–21. Cf. *Testament of Moses* 11:5–9, Eng. trans. J. Priest, "The Testament of Moses," in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, (New York, 1983), vol. 1, p. 933.

⁶⁷ For a full discussion of this tradition, see Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses*, pp. 270–85.

⁶⁸ This is Tromp's conclusion, *ibid.*, p. 271.

⁶⁹ M. E. Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha, with Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition* (Leiden, 1991), p. 54.

⁷⁰ See also, *Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11, 10, ed. S. Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1974).

⁷¹ Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha*, p. 55.

the spot in the fourth century, mention any tomb or church in this place.⁷² Epiphanius was certain that no man knew Moses' sepulchre because he became totally spiritual.⁷³ Gregory of Nyssa exploited this notion in a mystical context, stressing that Moses did not leave any traces or memorial for the "earthly burden."⁷⁴

Noteworthy in this context is the additional focus in fourth-century Christian discourse concerning the puzzling death of Moses—that is, his burial place. Jewish and Christian writers endeavoured to explain on the one hand why Moses' burial place was unknown and on the other where its precise location might be—questions that met the ongoing Christian propensity for sacred geography at that time.⁷⁵ Aphrahat, in the mid-fourth century, wrote that the Lord had said to Moses: "I shall bury you and hide you and no one shall know your tomb," explaining that the Lord thereby conferred a double favour on Moses: first, because his adversaries would not know the place they would not scatter his bones; second, because the people of Israel would not know the place they would not render his tomb into a cultic place and offer sacrifices there, given that they considered Moses to be a god (Exod. 7:1). And according to Aphrahat, no one to this day knows his tomb.⁷⁶ The same argument is preserved in the Armenian pseudepigrapha:

Michael, the archangel, buried him and no man knew his tomb and his bones up to the present, for two reasons. First, because Moses was named God. Therefore he was buried secretly and unknown to me, lest they see their God dead. Second, lest men take his tomb and bones as an object of worship.⁷⁷

This tradition crops up also in the mediæval midrash *Leqah Tov*: "And why is not known the burial place of Moses? So that Israel would not go and make there a sanctuary and sacrifice and offer

⁷² Eusebius, *Onomastikon*, "Abarim," "Nebo," ed. E. Klostermann (Hildesheim, 1966), pp. 16, 136; Epiphanius, *Weights and Measures* 63, ed. J. E. Dean, *Epiphanius' Treatise on Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version* (Chicago, 1935), p. 71.

⁷³ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69.6, ed. K. Holl (Berlin, 1980), p. 514.

⁷⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *In psalmorum inscriptiones* VII.14, ed. and trans. J. Reynard, SC 466 (Paris, 2002), pp. 208–9.

⁷⁵ For some of these legends, see M. Ish-Shalom, "The Cave of the Machpela and the Sepulchre of Moses: The Development of Aggadic Tradition," *Tarbitz* 41 (1971–1972), pp. 203–10 (in Hebrew).

⁷⁶ Aphrahat, *Demonstratio* VIII, *Patrologia Syriaca* 1, ed. J. Parisot, cols. 377–80. Origen, too, was aware of this explanation, *Selecta in Num.*, PG 12, 578b.

⁷⁷ Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha*, p. 56.

incense there, and so that the nations of the world will not defile his grave with their idols and their abominations.”⁷⁸ The second part of the midrash reflects the Jewish response to the Christian cult of saints and martyrs.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Numbers 32:3,38) identifies Mount Nebo as the burial ground of Moses, referring to the place mentioned in the biblical verse as the “burial place of Moses.”⁷⁹ This geographical interest in the burial place of Moses is echoed in the Babylonian Talmud in the name of Rabbi Berechyah: “The wicked government once sent [a message] to the *gastera*⁸⁰ of Beit-Pe‘or: ‘Show us where Moses is buried.’”⁸¹ Egeria, who visited Palestine in the 380s, recounted one of the early testimonies about the tomb of Moses that she heard from the monks of Mount Nebo:

Right on the summit of Mount Nebo, and inside, in the position of the pulpit, I saw a slightly raised place about the size of a normal tomb. I asked about it, and the holy men replied, “Holy Moses was buried here—by angels, since the Bible tells us ‘No human being knows his burial.’ And there is no doubt that it was angels who buried him, since the actual tomb where he was buried can be seen today. Our predecessors here pointed out this place to us, and now we point it out to you.” They told us that this tradition came from their predecessors.⁸²

There is nothing striking, of course, in this attempt to identify the tomb of a biblical figure in the eight decade of the fourth century—an era awash with the cults of saints and relics.⁸³ Yet it is most likely that until the mid-fourth century, Christians dealt with the enigma of Moses’ burial place in a Jewish polemical context, as attested in Aphrahat’s *Demonstratio*. From Egeria’s account, however, a new interest was clearly rising, one that David Satran in another context called

⁷⁸ *Leqah Tov* 68a. This fear is also present in a legend about Adam, as shown in Ish-Shalom, “Cave of the Machpela and the Sepulchre of Moses,” p. 203 note 6.

⁷⁹ The earlier *Targum Onqelos* has no tradition regarding Moses’ burial place. See S. Crois, “Emperor Hadrian: The First of Palestine’s Explorers,” *Hashiloach* 39 (1920), pp. 421–33, 526–40 (in Hebrew).

⁸⁰ *Castra*, a military fortification or fortress. See also Crois, “Emperor Hadrian,” pp. 427–28.

⁸¹ *b Sotah* 13b; *Sifre on Deuteronomy* 357.

⁸² *Egeria’s Travels* 12, Eng. trans., J. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels to the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 107.

⁸³ Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine*, pp. 105–10.

“the flavor of geographical exactitude.”⁸⁴ The last layer of the legend of Moses’ burial place at Mount Nebo is found in the *Life of Peter*, completing the tradition of Egeria with the account of the *inventio* of Moses’ tomb. But unlike Egeria, who simply accepted the account of the monks of Mount Nebo without asking about the discovery of the precise location of Moses’ burial, John Rufus was aware of the difficulty entailed in Deuteronomy 34:6. In no other composition does this story of the *inventio* of Moses’ tomb fit so well as in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, where the course of the hero’s life is organized in accordance with the biblical figure of Moses and forged in his pattern. Even Rufus’ description of Peter’s death is reminiscent of the angelic struggle over Moses’ body:

For there is an assembly gathered in heaven now for this, the Lord seated first, and all his saints and angels and archangels standing on his right hand and on his left, and much deliberation about the illness of the old man, Abba Peter. And some are pleading for him and saying . . . he is very old and ill, and so it is time for him to be delivered . . . but others are saying, “the Church needs him, my Lord, and the orthodox people.”⁸⁵

Discovering the Tomb of Moses

We learned there from those who dwelt on the mountain how those who built the sanctuary had been assured that the body of holy Moses was set there, and above it this sanctuary was built.⁸⁶ And the table and the altar were established, and under the altar a vessel of oil and dust. Since the holy Scripture clearly says thus: Moses the servant of the Lord died in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord, and they buried him in the land on the side of Baal-Pe’or, and no man knew his end to this day (Deut. 34:5–6). A shepherd from the village of Nebo, which is situated south of the mountain, was grazing his flock up to this place. When he came there he saw as in a vision a very large cave full of a great light and a sweet smell and splendor. Being astounded—for nothing like this had ever been seen in this place—and empowered with divine strength, he ventured to go down

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

⁸⁵ *V. Petri Ib.* 131.

⁸⁶ It seems that this tradition was unknown in Egeria’s time, otherwise she would not have failed to mention it, as she does in the case of the discovery of the tomb of Job (*Egeria’s Travels* 16.5–6, pp. 112–13). A different tradition, according to which the tomb of Moses is located in the Cave of the Machpela in Hebron, is mentioned in Ish-Shalom, “Cave.”

into the cave. There he saw a venerable old man, his face shining and full of grace, lying as it was on a brightening bed and flashing with glory and grace. He then understood that this was holy Moses. With fear and great joy he immediately ran to the village, hastening to make known the vision to the people there. Being made wise by God, he gathered small stones and raised up many piles in the place where he had seen the vision, lest when he came again he would not know the place.⁸⁷ And that is what occurred. When the villagers heard what had happened they ran in throngs to the place [of the vision] and searched for this cave. And this shepherd said, calling God as a witness, "In this place where these piles are set, I saw this vision, and went down into this cave and saw the holy prophet, therefore I put up these piles, so that even if the prophet was hidden again by God's command, yet these piles should make known the place. So when they and many other holy men were persuaded that the vision was true, all the local people ran as one man and brought the materials needed for building, and this sanctuary was built in the name of the great prophet lawgiver, openly and indubitably proclaiming to everyone his grace and his strength through signs, wonders and healing, which from that time have occurred continually in this place. For it is a common house of healing for souls and bodies, and a refuge to all those who come from all over to this place and are in sorrow of soul and held in diverse passions. So when we had prayed there and been supplied with the prayers of the great prophet, we arrived at the city aforementioned [Madaba]."⁸⁸

Rufus' account of this *inventio*, which occurred before Peter undertook the pilgrimage to Mount Nebo, prompts the question: What specific interest did John Rufus—the anti-Chalcedonian author of the *vita*—find in this tradition? Why did he insert into his composition the story of the *inventio* of Moses' tomb? Rufus himself did not provide any hint in the *vita*. One can surmise that by transmitting this *inventio*, Rufus enhanced Peter's authority as an anti-Chalcedonian leader. Theological controversies and the invention of saints' relics

⁸⁷ For the elusive nature of Moses' burial place, see also Sifre Deuteronomy 357, Eng. trans. R. Hammer, *Sifre—A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven, 1986), pp. 381–82: "The imperial house of Caesar once sent two commissioners with orders, 'Go and find the sepulchre of Moses.' They climbed above and saw the bier below, but when they went down below, they saw it up above. They then split up, half of them going up and half going down, but those above saw the bier below, while those below saw it above. Hence scripture says: 'And no man knows his sepulchre (unto this day).'" See also M. Ish-Shalom, "Midrash Eser Galuyot," *Sinai* 43 (1957), pp. 202–3 (in Hebrew). On the tradition connecting this search with Hadrian, see Crois, "Emperor Hadrian."

⁸⁸ *V. Petri Ib.* 87–89.

and martyrs' tombs went hand in hand in late antiquity. Bishops knew how to make capital out of such discoveries. It is worth recalling here that it was precisely during the synod of Diospolis in 415 that the news about the discovery of the tomb of Stephen reached the assembly dealing with the issue of Pelagius. As Hunt has observed, the discovery was a considerable political coup for John, the bishop of Jerusalem, and his Church in those circumstances.⁸⁹ An *inventio*—a sort of visual rhetoric of sanctity—confirms ecclesiastical authority and reinforces religious positions. From this perspective Rufus' account of Peter's patronage of the discovery of Moses' tomb fits his general goal, to confirm the anti-Chalcedonian faith.

The fourth passage dealing with pilgrimage in the *vita* is the story of the "simple and faultless monk," who tells his friends his dream of Peter the Iberian's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This is recounted against the background of the disciples' amazement that Peter had not visited the holy sites in Jerusalem during his long stay near the city.

Dream journey

After this, when the autumn had arrived, the blessed man [Peter] returned to his brethren in the plain. When he left, people were indignant and said: "How, when he [Peter] stayed all these days near Jerusalem, did the blessed not desire to enter the holy city, even by night, and worship at places of worship, and especially at holy Golgotha and the life-giving Sepulchre?" One day after his departure, one of the brothers who was a perfect and very simple man said to them: "This night I saw a fearful vision. For it seemed to me that I was seeing Abba Peter the bishop, who said to me, 'Brother, can you give me a hand?' and in this vision he alone took me to the holy city, on the same night during which he was about to depart."⁹⁰ He entered first to the Martyrium of St. Stephen, whom he had met before.⁹¹ Afterward, he went down to the cave and worshipped there his sarcophagus. Coming out of there he hastened to the holy Golgotha and the holy Sepulchre.⁹² From there he went down to the church named

⁸⁹ Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp. 214–20. See also Drijvers, "Promoting Jerusalem: Cyril and the True Cross."

⁹⁰ For the literary sources relating to the various places mentioned in this description, see Maraval, *Lieux saints*, pp. 251–73; O. Limor, *Holy Land Travels: Christian Pilgrims in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1998) (in Hebrew).

⁹¹ This may refer to a vision of Stephen the Protomartyr that Peter had had earlier.

⁹² On Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre, see J. E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy*

after Pilate (Matt. 27:11–14), and from there to that of the Paralytic (John 5:2–15), and then to Gethsemane. Having made the circuit also of the holy places around it, he then went up to the Upper Room of the disciples (Mark 14:14–16; Luke 22:11–13),⁹³ and after that to the holy Ascension (Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:9),⁹⁴ and from there to the house of Lazarus. He then went on the road leading from there until he arrived at holy Bethlehem. After praying there he turned to the tomb of Rachel (Gen. 35:19) and, having prayed there and in the rest of the shrines and oratories on the way, he descended to Siloam (John 9:7);⁹⁵ from there, going up to holy Zion⁹⁶ and completing a holy course and worshipped the Lord in every place, he finally returned to the village Beit Tafsha. And I, in every place was supporting him. And the very next day after I had seen the vision, the father went on his way. All this occurred in order to persuade those who were indignant that the blessed one was in every holy place every day, or perhaps every hour, offering in spirit worship to the Lord. For it is written: “Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny” (1 Cor. 2:15).⁹⁷

This imaginative journey maps with great exactitude the actual network of holy sites—a journey that every Christian pilgrim might

Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins (Oxford, 1993), pp. 113–42; idem, “Golgotha: A Reconsideration of the Evidence for the Sites of Jesus’ Crucifixion and Burial,” *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998), pp. 180–203; J. Patrich, “The Church of the Holy Sepulchre: History and Architecture,” in Y. Tsafirir and S. Safrai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem: The Roman and Byzantine Period (70–638 C.E.)* (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 353–81 (in Hebrew).

⁹³ This is an important testimony for the Mount of Olives tradition of the Last Supper, before it was transferred to Mount Zion. Egeria’s earlier testimony also supports this tradition (*Egeria’s Travels* 35.2–3). On the different names of the Eleona church, including “Church of the Disciples,” see Limor, *Holy Land*, p. 94 note 237. On a different tradition, locating the Last Supper in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, see *Theodosius* 10, ed. P. Geyer, *Itinera Hierosolymitana*, CSEL 39 (Vienna, 1898).

⁹⁴ For the “holy Ascension,” see also Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii*, 43, 37; *Vita Sabae*, 45. According to Rufus (*V. Petri* Ib. 30), the church was built under the patronage of Poemenia, probably during the 380s. On Poemenia’s activities in Jerusalem, see Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp. 160–63. In 439 Melania the Younger built a small martyrion inside this church in which she placed Stephen’s relics. See Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae* 57, 64, pp. 240, 258. According to Rufus (*V. Petri* Ib. 32–33), the relics of the Persian forty martyrs were also placed there.

⁹⁵ For the church of Siloam, see *V. Petri* Ib. 55.

⁹⁶ On the inauguration of the local church on Mount Zion in the days of John II, the successor of Cyril of Jerusalem, see M. van Esbroeck, “Une homélie sur l’église attribuée à Jean de Jérusalem,” *Le Muséon* 86 (1973), pp. 286–87; idem, “Jean II de Jérusalem et les cultes de s. Étienne, de la sainte-Sion et de la croix,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 102 (1984), pp. 107–12.

⁹⁷ *V. Petri* Ib. 98–100.

undertake at the end of the fifth century.⁹⁸ The author was here drawing the boundaries of the sacred space of Jerusalem and at the same time proclaiming the possession of this territory of grace—namely, that this network of holy places belonged to him too and not only to the Chalcedonians currently in possession of them. It seems that since Peter, faithful to the anti-Chalcedonian cause, was unable to enter the holy places at that time—a situation akin to that of Moses prevented from entering the Promised Land—Rufus resorted to this solution to the shameful situation in which anti-Chalcedonians were avoiding visiting the holy places.

With the dual emphasis in this *vita*, which combines the idea of sacred journey with the motif of *imitatio Mosis*, the author has succeeded in providing one of the more attractive hagiographic compositions from Byzantine Palestine, depicting Peter as “a glorious pillar of the orthodox faith”⁹⁹ and putting this portrayal at the service of anti-Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

⁹⁸ See Wilkinson's map of Peter's visionary pilgrimage, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, p. 41.

⁹⁹ *V. Petri Ib.* 13.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INVISIBLE HOLY MEN: BARSANUPHIUS AND JOHN

After the turbulent years of the Christological campaigns under the charismatic leadership of Peter the Iberian and his heirs, notably Severus of Antioch, the monastic centre of Gaza seems to have entered a new phase of a more quietist character and donned a Chalcedonian garb. This phase was marked by the peculiar style of spiritual leadership that had been initiated by Abba Isaiah and culminated in the holy men Barsanuphius and John. Here we wish to portray the two Old Men and to indicate some nuances in the multifaceted picture of the holy person in late antique society, especially as it evolved during the last three decades of the seminal studies of Peter Brown.¹ Brown's model was founded primarily on evidence from Syria and Asia Minor. According to him the different situation in Egypt stemmed from the harsh reality of the desert, where the clear-cut separation between the desert and the inhabited land caused a closing up of Egyptian hermitic monasticism in a struggle for survival.² While Brown focused primarily on the figure of the

¹ P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80–101 (= idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* Berkeley, 1982, pp. 103–52); idem, "The Saint as Exemplar," *Representation* 1 (1983), pp. 1–25; idem, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 57–78. For assessments of the evolution of Brown's view of the holy person in Late Antiquity, see S. Elm, "Introduction," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), pp. 343–51; and see Brown's own assessment, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997," in *ibid.*, pp. 353–76.

² Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man," p. 109. On the group segregation of Egyptian heremitic monasticism and its concern not to exercise its spiritual influence beyond its narrow circle, see P. Rousseau, "The Spiritual Authority of the 'Monk-Bishop': Eastern Elements in Some Western Hagiography of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 22 (1971), p. 397. But this monastic segregation can also be viewed as a rhetorical means of reconciling in the texts the tension between episcopal and ascetic authority in Egypt. See J. E. Goehring, "The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993), pp. 281–96. Brown's reconstruction also does not explain the figure of the holy man, notably Pachomius, in Egyptian coenobitic monasticism. See M. S. Burrows, "On the Visibility of God in the Holy Man: A Reconsideration of the Role of the Apa in the Pachomian Vitae," *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987), pp. 11–33.

holy man as a substitute for the village patron and as a “man of power,” Philip Rousseau emphasized his figure as a new kind of teacher with a new kind of *paideia*, identifying the central expression of authority within ascetic society as the relationship between master and disciple.³ Such authority certainly characterized the leadership of Barsanuphius and John.

The peculiar model of spiritual guidance in seclusion, maintaining contact with the outside world only through a disciple—developed by Abba Isaiah and taken further by Barsanuphius and John—is manifest in the latter’s *Correspondence*. Developed in ancient Egyptian cult centres, communication by means of questions and answers had long been an established oracular procedure. At the end of the fourth century or beginning of the fifth, it was adapted and revived by Christian Egyptian clergy in such cult centres as the shrine of St. Colluthus in Antinoë, where questions and answers were communicated by the priests of the site.⁴ This form of communication apparently constituted a discreet way of addressing personal problems. Albeit not indicative of a direct and conscious influence of the Egyptian cultic model on the new form of spiritual leadership *in absentia* now evolving in Gaza, the parallel seems quite striking. This pattern of leadership obviously precluded the development of a typical cult and pilgrimage centre around the figure of a holy person, along the lines studied by Brown. Yet at the same time the holy ascetics of Gaza may be viewed as forming a centre of religious power on the periphery of Palestine, outside the main circle of holy sites and pilgrimage routes, possibly serving also as a focal alternative to the holy centre of Jerusalem and the Judean Desert in the local ecclesiastical context following the Council of Chalcedon and the anti-Chalcedonian revolt in Palestine.

³ P. Rousseau, “Ascetics as Mediators and as Teachers,” in J. Howard-Johnson and P. A. Hayward (eds.), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 45–59, esp. pp. 54, 57. See also S. Rubenson, “Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography,” in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2000), pp. 110–39.

⁴ L. Papini, “Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum* from the Shrine of St. Colluthus,” in Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, pp. 393–401; A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides. L’apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris, 2001), pp. 336–39. On the perception of the holy person as taking on the classical function of oracles, see Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man,” p. 134.

Interaction between the two Old Men and lay people is reflected in a series of questions and answers—many of them not essentially different from those of the monks—touching on diverse aspects of life: work on Sunday,⁵ conduct in church,⁶ slaves,⁷ debts,⁸ agriculture,⁹ relations with Jews and pagans,¹⁰ relationship with parents and other family relatives,¹¹ magic,¹² diseases,¹³ attitude to heretics,¹⁴ Scripture,¹⁵ the bread and wine of the Eucharist,¹⁶ food blessings,¹⁷ demons' mode of operation,¹⁸ dreams,¹⁹ troubling thoughts,²⁰ repentance and penitence,²¹ prayer,²² adoration of relics,²³ making the sign of the cross,²⁴ timidity in society,²⁵ seclusion (of lay people),²⁶ relations with monks,²⁷ regular visits to the monastery,²⁸ negligence in mission on behalf of the monastery and regarding holy vessels,²⁹ debate on religious matters,³⁰ gaiety and laughter,³¹ conversation on

⁵ *Questions and Answers* 751.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 736–38.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 648–49, 653–57, 765.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 620, 672–74.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 685.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 687, 775–77. On the questions regarding business relations and personal friendship with Jews see A. Kofsky, “Aspects of Christian-Jewish Coexistence in Byzantine Palestine” (forthcoming).

¹¹ *Questions and Answers* 764, 767.

¹² *Ibid.*, 753–55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 645, 784–79.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 696, 699–701, 843.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 464, 469, 651, 698.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 463.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 715–19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 402–16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 418.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 429–32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 428, 730.

²² *Ibid.*, 438–43, 710–13.

²³ *Ibid.*, 433.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 436–37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 454, 659, 693.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 739–43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 455–57, 652, 681, 693–94, 705, 714, 723, 727–28, 738.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 761.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 745–47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 748.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 458–59. On abstention from laughter, see also Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 3, 5.45; A. Guillaumont, “Le rire, les larmes et l’humour chez les moines d’Egypte,” in idem, *Études sur la spiritualité de l’Orient chrétien*, Spiritualité orientale 66 (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1996), pp. 93–104.

issues not pertaining to religion,³² charity,³³ death and the end of the world,³⁴ free will,³⁵ relationships with friends,³⁶ cheating in business,³⁷ chariot races,³⁸ distraction of the mind,³⁹ relations with women,⁴⁰ promotion,⁴¹ pursuit of burglars,⁴² testimony in a murder case,⁴³ maintaining order at home,⁴⁴ bathing as a luxury,⁴⁵ the habit of buying protection from strongmen,⁴⁶ election of a new bishop (apparently of Gaza) and the attitude toward him.⁴⁷

These questions, relating to many aspects of life, provide a clear picture of the spiritual leadership and authority of the holy man, to whom his lay clientele turned for advice and guidance regarding not only religious matters but also daily, practical ones. In questions regarding ascetic morality—advocated to various degrees by lay people—the Old Men seen seldom to have made an essential distinction between monks and lay people.

In the last section of the *Correspondence* Barsanuphius and John emerge as major religious figures orchestrating provincial ecclesiastical affairs.⁴⁸ In this they continue the prominence of monastic figures in the ecclesiastical life of the Gaza region that began in the generation of Peter the Iberian and Abba Isaiah, followed by Severus of Antioch and his circle. Priests and bishops—among them probably the bishop of Gaza and the patriarch of Jerusalem—as well as lay leaders of the community consulted the Old Men about their religious leadership: A priest who was elected bishop by his community sought John's approval of his election.⁴⁹ A country bishop

³² *Questions and Answers* 470–73, 476, 707–8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 617–40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 641–43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 763.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 646, 676, 690, 731–33, 757–60.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 749–50, 756.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 645.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 660.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 661–63.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 664.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 667–69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 671.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 729.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 770–71.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 785.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 793–803, 845.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 788–839.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 788.

(χωρεπίσκοπος) asked whether he should leave his office and retire to a monastery.⁵⁰ A bishop who was previously a monk consulted Barsanuphius on whether he should return to monastic life.⁵¹ Another bishop turned to him for edification.⁵² Yet another bishop, emissary of the emperor, consulted Barsanuphius on a political-ecclesiastical affair.⁵³

From the dark depths of his cell Barsanuphius pulled the strings of the local ecclesiastical scene. In one instance, the citizens of the town turned to Barsanuphius for his advice on their choice among three candidates for the office of bishop, the previous bishop having been corrupt and estranged himself from the community. This bishop had been convicted by a regional council but later published polemical writings and was finally deposed.⁵⁴ The election on which the citizens had consulted the Old Man eventually took place, and a successful bishop was elected. But the wealthy deposed bishop now went to Constantinople to demand his seat back and a rumor circulated that he had succeeded. Afraid to appeal to the emperor, the citizens turned again to Barsanuphius. He instructed them to appeal to the emperor and persuade him that the deposition had taken place according to the rules, and to attach copies of the deposed bishop's polemical writings as well as the protocol of the appropriate election of the new bishop.⁵⁵ The citizens, however, failed to appeal, and the deposed bishop arrived in Caesarea from the capital and presented the governor with the imperial edict of his restoration. Confused and frightened, the citizens turned once more to the Old Man. Meanwhile the governor took command of the city in order to impose the edict. But suddenly news arrived that the emperor had died. Everything was halted, and the deposed bishop left the town having spent his money in vain.⁵⁶ We know neither who the deposed bishop was nor the identity of the newly elected one, but the emperor in question may have been Justin I (d. 527).

The newly elected bishop apparently consulted Barsanuphius regularly. At one point, regarding himself as unworthy of the office, he

⁵⁰ Ibid., 789.

⁵¹ Ibid., 790.

⁵² Ibid., 791.

⁵³ Ibid., 792.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 783.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 802.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 803.

wished to retire, but he was reassured by the Old Man.⁵⁷ The bishop continued to deliberate regarding the appointment and ordination of priests in his Church.⁵⁸ Barsanuphius went so far as to assert that in principle the endorsement of the fathers was sufficient to ensure the ordination of a priest.⁵⁹ It is quite striking that Barsanuphius and John, who themselves had never been formally ordained, were regularly involved in the ordination of priests in the region. But a priest chosen by the fathers occasionally refused his ordination despite the fathers' choice or would retire soon after his ordination, adhering to the old ascetic value of eschewing all forms of authority.⁶⁰ Faced with this situation, Barsanuphius astutely advised the bishop that it was best to select for ordination ascetics with social inclinations rather than extreme recluses.⁶¹

On at least one occasion Barsanuphius acted in stark contrast to his own principle. Wishing to carry out a series of nominations for various Church offices but hesitant about whom to appoint, the bishop sent a list of names to Barsanuphius, asking him to select the candidates from it. Ironically, the Old Man happened to choose those whom the bishop generally deemed least suited to the tasks. Astonished, the bishop questioned Barsanuphius about his selection; but the Old Man reassured him that God would take care of the matter.⁶² How would they be able to fulfill their duties when they were incapable of talking to people, the bishop persisted, only to be further reassured by the Old Man.⁶³ Fearing, however, that appointing those recommended by Barsanuphius would scandalize the community, the bishop suggested appointing only those who seemed to him fit. Barsanuphius rejected the proposal, insisting that God's will, expressed through the holy men, must be obeyed.⁶⁴ The bishop nevertheless hesitated to ordain his talented secretary, fearing it would be seen as nepotism. But again Barsanuphius assured him that the ordination should take place because the man was worthy; if a scandal

⁵⁷ Ibid., 804.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 805.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 806.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 807.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 808.

⁶³ Ibid., 809.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 811.

did result, it would surely pass.⁶⁵ Barsanuphius' paradoxical conduct in this matter remains unexplained in the text. In light of his deliberately refraining from disclosing the motives for his choice, we may surmise that the Old Man perceived his unique powers to be such that he was able to discern traits in the candidate's personality that remained hidden from the bishop.

Other letters indicate the Old Men's involvement in strictly municipal affairs. The bishop and the councilmen of the city—apparently Gaza—petitioned Barsanuphius and John regarding their complaint to the emperor about the military commander (*dux*), whose soldiers were molesting villagers in the region.⁶⁶ On another occasion the same leaders consulted John regarding the possibility of imposing a new tax in favor of the Church, on ships anchoring at the harbor of Gaza. In this case, however, John clearly did not wish Church intervention to go that far, deeming tax collection to be the exclusive domain of government.⁶⁷

The Old Men were also called upon to exercise their authority in the local struggle of the Church against the theatre. The mayor had acted against canon law, which forbade participation in theatrical events and pagan feasts.⁶⁸ The bishop complained about this to John and also conveyed his agitation about an influential citizen of the city who was currently staying in Constantinople and had sought his permission to attend performances. The bishop feared that if he refused, this citizen would conspire against him. John's answer was as might be expected: The mayor should obey canon law; theatres were the den of the devil, and those who went there were his accomplices and were lost to Christ.⁶⁹ These affairs illustrate the close and authoritative involvement of Barsanuphius and John in the life and leadership of the regional Church.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 812.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 831–34.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 835.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 836. On Pagan feasts and theatrical shows in Gaza, see N. Belayche, "Pagan Festivals in Fourth-Century Gaza," in B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 5–22; Z. Weiss, "Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza: Performances for the Masses Held in Buildings Now Lost," in Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, pp. 23–39.

⁶⁹ *Questions and Answers* 836–37.

Although the Old Men exercised their powers beyond the local and regional scene, their charisma did not, it seems, exceed the geographical boundaries of Palestine, since we found no evidence of their having had any specific contacts with secular or ecclesiastical leaders outside the province. Within the province, however, their influence extended to the highest echelons, as seen in the correspondence with the patriarch of Jerusalem, who is not identified by name but is apparently Peter (524–552).⁷⁰ He consulted Barsanuphius on various problems of local ecclesiastical politics, including Church appointments, ordinations, and power struggles within the local Church. For instance, a former lawyer who became a monk was ordained deacon by the patriarch and now wished to be ordained as a priest. But the patriarch was already regretting having appointed him deacon and now turned to Barsanuphius for advice.⁷¹ The patriarch was also hesitating about various ordinations in the rural communities and asked Barsanuphius for guiding principles in choosing candidates.⁷² In addition he complained to Barsanuphius about certain people in the community—among whom was an influential important donator—who were pressuring him to ordain a layman protégé and appoint him to a position in the Church.⁷³ Power struggles were being waged in the city and the patriarch had his opponents. Many government officials were expecting benefits and gifts from the Church, and the patriarch feared that if he did not comply they would use their influence with the government against him. He was so distressed that he wished to leave his office, but Barsanuphius advised him against doing so and offered him encouragement.⁷⁴ Other questions addressed to the Old Man concerned crypto-Manicheans wishing to be baptized, heretics seeking to join the communion, and the appropriate way to act toward a pagan; having been discovered among the community, many were demanding his execution or burning.⁷⁵

The holy man's leadership style as it emerges from the *Correspondence*, then, conforms to some extent with Peter Brown's classic description

⁷⁰ Ibid., 813–30.

⁷¹ Ibid., 813.

⁷² Ibid., 814.

⁷³ Ibid., 819.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 823–29.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 820–22.

of the holy man as patron, councillor, and arbiter, and as a spiritual and moral authority—a spiritual father (πατήρ πνευματικός).⁷⁶ The letters, however, while reflecting the reality of rural monasticism, do not mirror the reality of a rural mobile working crowd, an essential element in the life of the holy person in Syria as described by Brown,⁷⁷ although such a crowd certainly existed in the Gaza region as well.⁷⁸ Contact between a soldier clientele⁷⁹ and Seridus' monastery is attested, however, in the *Correspondence*⁸⁰ as well as in the *Vita* of Dositheus, the young servant of a general who joined the monastery and became a model of monastic obedience.⁸¹

Unlike in Brown's model, miracles and exorcism as means of channeling power and establishing and maintaining the role of the holy person in the society are topics virtually absent from the *Correspondence*.⁸² Physiognomy and similar skills of character discernment from a person's outward appearance are also irrelevant to Barsanuphius and John. They in fact seem to have been somewhat predisposed against the magical arts and divination techniques. Barsanuphius, for example, opposed a common oneiromantic belief that a triple occurrence in a dream is indicative of its truth.⁸³ John similarly objected to magical incantations, curative charms, and resorting to magicians, as being proscribed by God.⁸⁴ The two also expressed reservations regarding the exaggerated adoration of holy relics; it was enough to bow the head once in respect, or at most three times.⁸⁵ Making the

⁷⁶ Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," pp. 132–34; idem, *Authority and the Sacred*, pp. 60–62. On Barsanuphius' charismatic leadership, see F. Neyt, "Un type d'autorité charismatique," *Byzantion* 44 (1974), pp. 343–61. On the central status of the spiritual father in the pattern of spiritual leadership that developed in the monastic circle of Gaza, see Hausherr, *Direction Spirituelle*; also chap. 7, below. For the spiritual father in the *Apophthegmata*, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers*, pp. 26–87. For Evagrius, see G. Bunge, *Paternité spirituelle* (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1994).

⁷⁷ Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," p. 113.

⁷⁸ This reality is somewhat reflected in the *Vitae* of Hilarion, Porphyry of Gaza, Peter the Iberian, and Abba Isaiah.

⁷⁹ On the importance of soldier clientele for the reputation of the holy man in Syria, see Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," pp. 113–14.

⁸⁰ *Questions and Answers* 492–95.

⁸¹ *V. Dosithei* 2–3, pp. 124–26. See also *Questions and Answers* 492–99, dealing with a soldier who has recently become a monk.

⁸² Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," pp. 121–26.

⁸³ *Questions and Answers* 418.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 753–55.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 433.

sign of the cross excessively was likewise frowned upon; once a day was deemed sufficient.⁸⁶ Although the letters indicate a wide circle of individual devotees, it is doubtful whether we can talk about a cohesive clientele or a defined group of lay followers. They do, however, supply rich firsthand evidence for the make-up of the religious personality of the holy man and his interaction with his followers, as variously perceived by himself, his monastic circle, and the wider circle of his lay devotees. In other words, the *Correspondence* provide a glimpse of the ways in which the charismatic powers and personality of the holy person were understood. These differences, attested also in Abba Isaiah's *Asceticon* and Dorotheus' *Instructions*, may derive not merely from the different social setting or religious mood but also from the nature of the literary sources; whereas Brown's model is based primarily on hagiographic texts replete with miracle stories, the monastic corpus of Gaza for the most part comprises a variety of literary genres.

Barsanuphius and John reflect the self-consciousness of a spiritual elite.⁸⁷ They belonged to an order of ascetics who had attained perfection, and regarded themselves, metaphorically, as combatants in an elite military corps, wearing the "uniform" of the unit,⁸⁸ and envisaging their ascetic life as following the path of the tormented martyrs of past heroic generations.⁸⁹ It is this consciousness of ascetic perfection that charged them with spiritual energy and charismatic authority as holy men, elevating them to the status of mediators between their followers and God. Against this background it becomes possible to appreciate the universal powers attributed by Barsanuphius to perfect holy persons as guardians of humanity who sustain the world in times of great catastrophes such as the great plague—regarded as divine punishment, when the world was saved by the intercession of three distinguished holy men.⁹⁰

The overall impression is that whereas John was more inclined to deal with questions of social relations and the practical issues of monastic and lay life, the more intellectual Barsanuphius attended

⁸⁶ Ibid., 436.

⁸⁷ See, for example, *ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 256.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 569.

to those pertaining to spiritual struggle.⁹¹ John, in fact, effaced himself in relation to Barsanuphius, acknowledging the senior status of his elder.⁹² We may discern here two types of authority. Barsanuphius acted by means of prayer, instruction anchored in biblical interpretation, and mediation through Christ,⁹³ while John dealt with day-to-day matters.⁹⁴ This type of hierarchic division is reflected in John's instruction to Dorotheus: that in every word or act he must recall the name of the Old Man (i.e. Barsanuphius), and God would then guide him on how to speak and act.⁹⁵ John perceived his relationship with Barsanuphius as a bond of dependence, a union wherein his personality and self-will were effaced in Barsanuphius, and his powers were channelled through the prayers and intercession of the Great Old Man. Moreover, they were one, Barsanuphius in God and John through Barsanuphius: "... We are one," wrote John, "the Old Man in God and I in him ... But I cannot separate from the Old Man, because he makes me merciful, so that the two of us should be but one." (Εἰ ἓν ἔσμεν . . . ὁ Γέροντος ἐν τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ γὰρ σὺν αὐτῷ . . . ἀλλ' ἀποστῆναι τοῦ Γέροντος οὐ δύναμαι. Ἐλεος γὰρ ποιεῖ μετ' ἐμοῦ, τοῦ εἶναι τοὺς δύο ἓν).⁹⁶ Similarly Barsanuphius saw himself as one with John in a unity of identity.⁹⁷

In practice, the relationship between John and Barsanuphius also meant that John would often, out of humility, pass on to Barsanuphius questions that were addressed to himself. Apparently this excessive humility was sometimes misunderstood by the lay clientele, who might have been unaware of the hierarchy of holiness between the two Old Men and regarded the spiritual power of John as identical with that of Barsanuphius. They thus took offence at John transferring their questions to Barsanuphius, seeing it as a sign of mockery.⁹⁸

⁹¹ Neyt suggests that whereas Barsanuphius continued the Egyptian semi-anchoretic tradition, John was influenced by coenobitic monasticism, the different sources of influence determining the orientation of their respective spiritual guidance ("Autorité charismatique," p. 358).

⁹² *Questions and Answers* 252, 253.

⁹³ See, for example, *Questions and Answers* 263.

⁹⁴ Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 135–36; Neyt, Introduction to the SC edition of Barsanuphius and John, pp. 43–44.

⁹⁵ *Questions and Answers* 263.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 783.

The deep sense of intimacy (παρρησία) with God gained by the experienced ascetic, accompanied by the awareness of a superior morality, nourished the self-confidence of the holy person; it charged him with spiritual energy and did much to give him an honoured standing in the eyes of men. Although not elaborated in their correspondence, it is plausible that with Barsanuphius and John such intimacy was sustained by mystical experience—different in kind from the intellectual mysticism of Evagrius Ponticus.⁹⁹ In general, the intellectual portrayal of the leaders of Gaza suggests a relatively minor extent of speculative mysticism in its Evagrian flavour or its allegorical interpretation of Scripture. *Letter* 137b, however, shows that such inclinations were not totally alien to this community.¹⁰⁰ It may be that both Barsanuphius and John were experiencing mystical union in their intensive meditation.¹⁰¹ In a rare passage describing spiritual progress reaching its apogee in the state of deification (θέωσις) of the perfect ascetic, they may have been attesting their own experience. The perfect pneumatic reached a degree of elevation where he is subject to no more distraction or disturbance, “becoming all mind, all eye, all alive, all luminous, all perfect, all gods” (ὅλοι νοῦς γενόμενοι, ὅλοι ὀφθαλμός, ὅλοι ζῶντες, ὅλοι φῶς, ὅλοι τέλειοι, ὅλοι θεοί).¹⁰² Perfection, then, is experienced as a total spiritual and luminous state of being through deification; the perfect ascetic has become

⁹⁹ On Evagrius’ intellectual mysticism, see A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 100–113.

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed analysis of this letter, see chapter 5, below.

¹⁰¹ On meditation and prayer as major forms of spiritual exercise, see chap. 7, below.

¹⁰² *Questions and Answers* 207. See *Apophthegmata*, Bessarion 11, PG 65, 141d: “The monk ought to be as the Cherubim and the Seraphim: all eye.” The *Apophthegmata* in general does not seem to supply much evidence for mystical inclination; but the Desert Fathers may well have had a mystical bent beyond this general impression, indicating that Evagrius was not an exception. See G. Bunge, “Le ‘lieu de la limpidité.’ À propos d’un apophtegme énigmatique: Budge II, 494,” *Irénikon* 55 (1982), p. 17. Some of the visionary experiences recorded in the *Apophthegmata* may also indicate mystical trances. See A. Guillaumont, “Les visions dans le monachisme oriental chrétien,” in idem, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien*, pp. 136–47; Gould, *The Desert Fathers*, pp. 42–44, 177–82. Abba Isaiah and Peter the Iberian could also be regarded as mystics. See S. Vailhé, “Un mystique monophysite, le moine Isaïe,” *Échos d’Orient* 9 (1906), pp. 81–91; John Rufus, *V. Petri Ib.* 77; Honigsmann, *Pierre l’Ibérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite*; Kofsky, “Peter the Iberian,” p. 215. On early monastic mysticism in general, see Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*; B. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York, 1991), pp. 131–96.

a god like God.¹⁰³ In this state he is delivered and purified from the “old man” (τοῦ παλαιοῦ ἀνθρώπου)—his old self in Pauline terms—and both his body and his soul are sanctified.¹⁰⁴ This state is perceived also as a transition from non-being to being (ἀπὸ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι).¹⁰⁵ Deification (θέωσις)¹⁰⁶ through mystical experience becomes the ultimate monastic goal. It is also understood according to traditional monastic spirituality as an imitation of the Son of God, epitomized in a maxim of Barsanuphius: “The Son of God became a man for you; be you also a god for him” (“Ἀνθρώπος γέγονε διὰ σὲ ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, γενοῦ καὶ σύ, δι’ αὐτὸν θεός).¹⁰⁷ The self-perceived spiritual transformation into divine luminary existence infused Barsanuphius with the keen sense of being an extension or instrument of God or the Holy Spirit, speaking and working through him. This perception was inductively applied to the holy fathers as a distinct elite of pneumatic ascetics.¹⁰⁸ It could sometimes be expressed in rather extreme form, where Barsanuphius could declare that the fathers were not responsible for their words; it was God who spoke through them according to his mysterious ways.¹⁰⁹ This is clearly an expression of the self-conceived oracular nature of their prophetic powers. The result was Barsanuphius’ ongoing awareness of the divine presence in the sustained serenity of his soul,¹¹⁰ an emphasis on his identification with Scripture as the divine word, and an intimate relation with God and the Holy Spirit, empowering him to see hidden truths through the gift of prophecy.¹¹¹ Like other monastic circles, this one also developed forms of meditative prayer as a supreme technique for combating the demons operating through one’s thoughts. The essence of the meditative technique lay in differentiating the various thoughts surfacing in the stream of consciousness during

¹⁰³ *Questions and Answers* 207, 484.

¹⁰⁴ For the evolution of the complex though essentially positive perception of the body in Eastern monastic circles, see Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 213–40.

¹⁰⁵ *Questions and Answers* 200.

¹⁰⁶ On the evolution of this concept in patristic thought, see B. Satorius, *La doctrine de la déification de l’homme d’après les Pères grecs* (Geneva, 1965).

¹⁰⁷ *Questions and Answers* 199.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 361, 382.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 778b.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹¹¹ Cf. Neyt, Introduction, pp. 111–14. For Shenoute’s similar self-perception as a prophet and a holy man with unique powers, see Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, pp. 55–56.

prayer as divine, demonic, or natural, by simultaneously questioning the nature of a specific thought and consequently neutralizing it or attaining knowledge through it.¹¹² Barsanuphius was apparently also occupied in a form of meditation on the letters of the alphabet, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

It was ascetic perfection resulting in divine intimacy and deification that imbued the holy men of Gaza with their charismatic powers and awareness of their unique faculties, distinct from those of ordinary monks and laymen. Not possessing the traditional signs of power and authority—namely ordination—Barsanuphius and John regarded themselves, and were similarly regarded by their clientele, as endowed with the power to prophesy, discern thoughts, and remit sins.¹¹³ These powers, this true knowledge, belonged exclusively to the perfect ascetic, who spoke in the name of God and had ceased to be the prey of demons.¹¹⁴

Every ascetic had to wrestle with thoughts that surfaced on the stream of consciousness; but the power to let negative thoughts enter and to fight them from within was reserved to the perfect; the weak should preempt their entrance to avoid succumbing to them.¹¹⁵ The sophisticated weapon of monastic psychology, the discernment of thoughts, belonged to the perfect. One should turn to the Old Men and reveal one's thoughts.¹¹⁶ Only the holy fathers were able to discern immediately a seemingly benevolent demonic dissimulation; others could grasp it only in retrospect, according to its negative or positive result.¹¹⁷ In fact the essence of the relation of the holy man or spiritual father with his disciple or devotee lay in the latter opening himself to the holy man, enabling him to discern and examine the thoughts of the heart.¹¹⁸ Moreover we meet here the unusual concept of the father actually shouldering the sins of his devotees, taking the responsibility, and sometime even the blame, for their sins. Monks and laymen should therefore obey his command even

¹¹² *Questions and Answers* 124, 166, 407, 427.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 10, 116, 184, 211, 575b.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 373.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 138, 432.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 405.

¹¹⁸ On the mandatory disclosure of thoughts to the father in the *Apophthegmata*, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers*, pp. 32–33.

if it seemed to involve a sin.¹¹⁹ “If the fathers tell you that darkness is light, try to believe that it is so.”¹²⁰

Barsanuphius and John claimed that perfect ascetics were empowered to overcome the various passions, emphasizing that they alone had the power to overcome sexual impulses entirely. Success in doing so was regarded as the crowning victory over the passions and a preparatory stage in the attainment of deification. The perfect ascetic was immune to even the stimulation caused by the erotic images in dreams. He was immune from even those stimulations considered natural and not demonic. He had suppressed them; he had become a spiritual eunuch (Matt 19:12).¹²¹

Like other holy men, Barsanuphius and John were imbued, through divine intimacy, with spiritual and healing powers. Unlike them, however, these powers were channelled not through acts of direct miraculous intervention but through prayers,¹²² blessings—a virtual substitute for amulets—and physical contact with objects belonging to the sick.¹²³ But such powers were not to be excessively celebrated or publicized. The old men received requests for prayers on behalf of the sick, and their prayers are documented as having been effective.¹²⁴ In one case a sick layman asked Barsanuphius to pray for him and drink the water that his fever had prevented him from drinking. Barsanuphius complied with the request and the man was cured. Glorifying God and Barsanuphius, the patient told some friends about the Old Man’s great deed, but in a short while the fever reappeared. When he returned to Barsanuphius the Old Man scolded him for having boasted about his healing powers, which was indeed the reason for

¹¹⁹ *Questions and Answers* 58, 541, 690.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 842.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 169. See chap. 5, below.

¹²² Barsanuphius similarly instructs monks that in solving certain problems when it is not possible to consult the fathers, prayer should become their substitute, hence three prayers are essential for each affair. He goes on to explain that it is preferable to recite three prayers on three different days, but in an emergency he can recite three prayers at the same time (*Questions and Answers* 365–66).

¹²³ Medical issues and miraculous healing by the holy man are central, e.g., in the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius of Sinai. See G. Dagron, “Le saint, le savant, l’astrologue: Étude de thèmes hagiographiques à travers quelques recueils de ‘Questions et réponses’ des V^e–VII^e siècles,” in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés IV^e–XII^e siècles* (Paris, 1981), pp. 143–56.

¹²⁴ For the curative efficacy of the prayers of the holy fathers, see *Questions and Answers* 390.

the relapse.¹²⁵ The healing powers of the Old Men, however, were not always viewed with complete trust and credulity. A sick layman, having received a promise of recuperation from John, became suspicious when his recuperation was delayed and complained to Barsanuphius, suspecting John of a dishonest promise. Barsanuphius replied that everything promised by God through John would be fulfilled, but that it was the latent disbelief in the heart of the petitioner that had prevented his cure.¹²⁶ Another means of transmitting protective and energizing powers was by the holy men of Gaza wearing items of clothing of a devotee for a short time, then returning them to be worn by the petitioner. Once a monk sent Barsanuphius a hood (κουκούλιον) and a scapular (ἀνάλαβος), asking the Old Man to bless them so that they might protect him against temptation. Barsanuphius promised to wear them for three days and return them sanctified.¹²⁷

One of the most impressive powers attained by the holy ascetic was a certain degree of control over death. The holy man had the power to grant permission to die—namely, to control the time of death and affect the posthumous fate of the soul. These powers can be seen at work in a group of letters recounting the death of the young monk Dositheus as well as the death of another, unnamed brother. Dying from tuberculosis, Dositheus sought Barsanuphius' forgiveness for his sins. The Old Man's answer was somewhat enigmatic, so Dositheus' friends turned to John for clarification. John explained that with God's inspiration Barsanuphius could ask for life for Dositheus. But when they begged Barsanuphius to do this, he declined. Dositheus was not about to die but to become instantly rich through a transition to everlasting life, though Barsanuphius asked them not to reveal this secret to Dositheus. They then appealed to Barsanuphius to shorten his misery by hastening his death. But the Great Old Man responded that Dositheus' suffering had been prolonged in order to multiply the prayers on his behalf. Suffering greatly, Dositheus himself turned to Barsanuphius, beseeching release. Be patient, Barsanuphius told him, just a while longer. But when a

¹²⁵ Ibid., 643. See also *ibid.*, 784, reflecting a joint healing achieved by Barsanuphius and John.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 645. Another case of complaint and distrust of John's healing powers is recorded in *ibid.*, 779–82.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 123.

few days later Dositheus declared that he could bear it no longer, the Old Man replied: "Go in peace and stand by the side of the Holy Trinity."¹²⁸

When John was about to die following the death of Seridus, Aelianus, the inexperienced successor of Seridus, pleaded with John to postpone his death by two weeks to allow him (Aelianus) sufficient time to learn the management of the monastery. John assented—further impressive evidence of his powers in such matters.¹²⁹ Barsanuphius' power to perceive the posthumous fate of the soul was confirmed by the vision of another old man: he had seen Dositheus standing among the saints in heaven.¹³⁰ These powers were acknowledged by both Barsanuphius and his clientele. Once a dying monk begged Barsanuphius to help him die quickly, present him before Christ, guide him by his prayers, and accompany him on his posthumous journey. Barsanuphius complied. He presented the monk before Christ so as to allay his fear of death and elevate his soul without harm to the saints, the angels, and the Trinity.¹³¹ Barsanuphius' power and protection over souls did apparently extend to the next world.¹³²

Barsanuphius' charismatic holiness had a pedagogic side as well. His spiritual leadership was conveyed through pedagogic and psychological means designed to encourage his followers. Thus the elements of his monastic *paideia* were applied individually and didactically according to the spiritual powers and status of the monk.¹³³ In many letters Barsanuphius proved himself an insightful psychologist, often addressing delicate situations. One such was an impending crisis in the relationship between two friends living together. One of them, having recently married, feared that with the three now living together, his marriage would change his friend's attitude toward him.¹³⁴ Barsanuphius regarded the monks in his monastery, and his devotees in general, as his adopted children¹³⁵ and was therefore able to

¹²⁸ *V. Dosithei* 10, p. 138; *Questions and Answers* 220–23.

¹²⁹ *Questions and Answers* 599b.

¹³⁰ *V. Dosithei* 13, p. 144.

¹³¹ *Questions and Answers* 219.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 274.

¹³³ See, for example, *ibid.*, 136, 330, 363.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 646.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 195, 614.

convey the conviction that he indeed shared their worries.¹³⁶ Moreover, a unique pact was sealed in their mutual relations of open hearts and prayer. According to John, the keeping of this pact with Barsanuphius guaranteed attainment of the kingdom of heaven.¹³⁷

In contradistinction to Barsanuphius' charismatic authority, that of John seems a hybrid of charismatic and institutional authority, and that of Seridus primarily institutional.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, the relationship of Barsanuphius and John with the monastic community, and in fact with the world at large, depended entirely on Seridus as their representative.

As reflected in their correspondence, Barsanuphius and John maintained a negative attitude to theology—a legacy of Abba Isaiah. This tendency had in fact been expressed already by Zeno, an older contemporary of Isaiah.¹³⁹ Compared to the intensive occupation with the practical side of monastic life and quietist ascetic spirituality, and in line with the *Apophthegmata* and Abba Isaiah's *Asceticon*, the letters barely concern themselves with theological matters. Their guiding principle is that dabbling in theology can only confuse the believer and introduce heretical thoughts into his mind. The study of theological issues should therefore be exclusively reserved to the experienced and perfect ascetic. This position is in fact compatible with the anti-intellectual tendency of Barsanuphius and John, who essentially objected to the study not only of non-Christian literature but of all Christian literature as well, with the exception of the *Apophthegmata* and the Scriptures.¹⁴⁰ Even independent study of the Scriptures was considered liable to implant heresy in the hearts of believers unfamiliar with its spiritual interpretation. A layman asked if it was beneficial to relate stories from the Bible and the lives of the ascetics. He was answered that the great virtue was silence, but due to our weakness one may talk about that which invigorates the soul—namely, the *Apophthegmata*—whereas Scripture might be dangerous for those uninitiated into its spiritual interpretation.¹⁴¹ Despite the overall anti-

¹³⁶ Ibid., 330.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 306.

¹³⁸ Neyt, "Un type d'autorité charismatique." See also Neyt, "Citations," p. 80. On ascetic charismatic authority, see Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church*, pp. 19–32.

¹³⁹ See Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 26.18; *Apophthegmata*, Zeno 4, PG 65, 176d.

¹⁴⁰ *Questions and Answers* 600, 604, 694–97.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 469. See also *ibid.*, 697. This was apparently also the stance of Abba

intellectual trend, certain relations between Barsanuphius and John and intellectual circles were maintained, as reflected in the correspondence with anonymous teachers of philosophy—though not on philosophical issues—and in the arrival at the monastery of educated monks such as Dorotheus.¹⁴² One monk wrote Barsanuphius that upon reading theological books he had felt his soul elevated beyond passionate thoughts toward contemplation of the truths revealed by these books. But as it happened his soul had rebuked him, saying: “You do not benefit from reading such things, you who are wretched (ἄθλιος) and impure (ἀκάθαρτος)!” Barsanuphius retorted: “I did not find satisfaction in these books which exalt the soul, but rather in the Sayings of the Elders (λόγοι τῶν γερόντων = *Apophthegmata*) because they lead the soul to humility.”¹⁴³

Describing meetings between fathers and laymen where theological discussions took place, a layman asked Barsanuphius whether he should participate in such discussions or remain silent, and whether his silence was not in fact a betrayal of the faith. The Old Man instructed him never to argue about matters concerning faith, declaring that dogmatic issues were beyond him. He should instead concentrate on praying for his sins.¹⁴⁴ When the questioner asked further whether he should at least study the decisions of the Church, Barsanuphius commanded: “Do not study anything that God does not demand of you,”¹⁴⁵ clearly intending that one should not study at all, for fear of introducing doubt and heresy. One should be

Isaiah. See *Asceticon* 30.4, in statements ascribed to Poimen, one of the prominent figures of the *Apophthegmata*. Thus alongside a certain intellectual openness Abba Isaiah also evinces an anti-intellectual tendency. On the dangers inherent in the study of Scripture, see also *Apophthegmata* alph. Amoun 3. On the complex attitude to Scripture in the *Apophthegmata*, see D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 107–77; on its negative aspect, see *ibid.*, pp. 154–57. For anti-intellectual bias in the *Apophthegmata*, see Rousseau, “The Spiritual Authority of the Monk-Bishop,” p. 385. The attitude to Scripture in Pachomian monasteries, however, was considerably more liberal, and monks were encouraged to discuss among themselves the reflections on Scripture offered by their superiors. See Rousseau, *Pachomius*, p. 81.

¹⁴² *Questions and Answers* 664–66, 778.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 547.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 694. A similar stance was taken by Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 26.18. In *Asceticon* 4.67–68, Abba Isaiah warns against polemics with heretics for fear of incurring harm.

¹⁴⁵ *Questions and Answers* 696.

satisfied with a statement of the right faith.¹⁴⁶ Thus the clear policy of Barsanuphius and John, at least regarding laymen and ordinary monks, was that of perpetuating blissful ignorance. This attitude to theology, however, may indicate not merely a negative approach motivated by fear of doubt and heresy but also a quietist monastic tendency.¹⁴⁷ This stance is reflected in the answer to the same layman's question as to whether he should curse and condemn Nestorius when asked to do so: One should not be hasty to condemn—even though Nestorius and his followers were excommunicated—because we are all sinners and must therefore focus on repentance for our sins without mixing it with other matters.¹⁴⁸ “If I condemn the devil while doing his deeds,” proclaimed Barsanuphius, “I condemn myself.”¹⁴⁹ But if the questioner is constantly pressured he may be permitted to condemn the heretic in order to satisfy those exerting pressure on him.¹⁵⁰

From consultations with Barsanuphius and John regarding the Origenist controversy of the sixth century we can glean something of their position on the matter and their essential attitude to theology. The polemics against Origen's theological views, which had begun not long after his death, resumed at the end of the fourth century.¹⁵¹ In the first half of the sixth century the Church was beset by yet another bitter polemic over Origen. In Palestine, Jerusalem clergy and monks from the Judean Desert were especially involved, and the controversy sometimes escalated to violence between the parties.¹⁵² This time criticism was directed not only against Origen's writing but perhaps more against those of his followers in later

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ On judgement of others in the *Apophthegmata*, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers*, pp. 123–32.

¹⁴⁸ *Questions and Answers* 699.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 700.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ See Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*.

¹⁵² The Origenist controversy of the sixth century and its Palestinian aspects have been studied extensively. See, for example, Perrone, *La Chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 203–22; idem, “Palestinian Monasticism, the Bible, and Theology in the Wake of the Second Origenist Controversy,” in J. Patrich (ed.), *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* (Leuven, 2001), pp. 245–259; D. Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy: A New Perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis' Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-Century Origenism*, *Studia Anselmiana* 132 (Rome, 2001); idem, “Barsanuphius and John of Gaza and the Origenist Controversy,” in Bitton-

generations, especially Evagrius Ponticus.¹⁵³ The dispute focused primarily on the issues of the preexistence of the soul and the nature of body and soul after resurrection. A certain monk addressed to Barsanuphius and John a series of questions regarding the Origenist controversy. Having read the writings of Origen, Didymus, and Evagrius, he was asking about the belief in the preexistence of human, angelic, and demonic souls, and about their return with the ἀποκατάστασις to their pure primordial state.¹⁵⁴ Barsanuphius condemned these doctrines as the speculation of Greeks. They did not lead believers to the light and were in fact demonic machinations. One should not concern oneself with the hidden future. Nonetheless, God had no difficulty in simultaneously creating body and soul. Barsanuphius further objected to the idea of change and advancement in the degree of angels. But while condemning Origenist concepts, Barsanuphius hardly addressed them; he did not elaborate his objections beyond their ultimate rejection and his repeated command to concentrate on the study of the *Apophthegmata*.¹⁵⁵ The same monk addressed an identical question to John and received an answer condemning these concepts as demonic.¹⁵⁶ Persisting, the monk asked whether one might at least read the writings of Evagrius. The answer was that one might read them, but only selectively.¹⁵⁷ The monk pointed out that some of the fathers had accepted the Origenist doctrines through Evagrius, and this was indeed confirmed by Barsanuphius; yet he was nevertheless inclined to oppose Origenism. He emphasized, though, that the important thing was not the truth or error of these views; instead both the questioner and Barsanuphius himself should not be preoccupied with them but should concentrate on an examination of their emotions (ἐρευνᾶν τὰ πάθη), weeping, and compunction (κλαῦσαι καὶ πενθῆσαι).¹⁵⁸ The questioner and his fellow monks went on to com-

Ashkelony and Kofsky (eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, pp. 173–81.

¹⁵³ See A. Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens* (Paris, 1962), pp. 124–70.

¹⁵⁴ The monk referred especially to the *Képhalaia Gnostica*, containing Origenist doctrines. See A. Guillaumont's edition, PO 28,1 (Paris, 1958).

¹⁵⁵ *Questions and Answers* 600.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 601.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 602.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 603. On the monastic ideal of compunction (πένθος), see I. Hausherr, *Penthos: La doctrine de la componction dans l'Orient chrétien*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 132 (Rome, 1944), Eng. trans. *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East* (Kalamazoo, 1982); P. Nagy, *Le don des larmes au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2000), pp. 41–104.

plain to Barsanuphius that other monks were advocating the Origenist doctrine of the soul's preexistence, deriving support for it from Gregory of Nazianzus. In contrast to Gregory, however, they claimed that the soul was attached to the body as a punishment for previous sins and that they had even found support for their view in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, though Gregory himself had rejected this opinion. They further distorted his statements on the ἀποκατάστασις. The monks questioned Barsanuphius as to how Gregory of Nyssa could be wrong regarding the disagreement among Christian authors on whether Paradise was material or spiritual, and on their interpretation of certain biblical verses. The crux of Barsanuphius' answer was that preoccupation with these matters causes only harm and confusion. Even the saints did not have a full understanding of the divine mysteries. In addition, though, Barsanuphius pointed to the hermeneutic principle of discerning between unorthodox views accepted by authors uncritically from certain teachers and the authors' own thoughts. His general approach to theology was summed up in his instruction to focus on the struggle against the passions, for which we would be called to account on the Day of Judgement, whereas we would not be examined concerning these matters of theology, whether we had studied them or not.¹⁵⁹

The inquisitive monk followed with theological questions regarding heterodox views encountered in the *Apophthegmata*. He inquired about the opinion that the holy bread was not the body of Christ but only a symbol, and that Christ was in fact Melchizedek—why did God allow these great men to fall into error? The answer was that God did not lead them astray but that these wise men did not investigate the matter in the pursuit of truth. Sages in various generations, however, complement one another.¹⁶⁰ Barsanuphius' replies did not succeed in allaying the monk's concern with the theological issues of the Origenist controversy. He had, he said, read another theological work that caused great confusion in his soul. He was hesitant about addressing Barsanuphius but claimed that his thoughts did not allow him to remain silent. Barsanuphius rebuked him, declaring that the devil was pushing him to useless matters. However, he permitted the monk to raise his questions so as to preempt demonic

¹⁵⁹ *Questions and Answers* 604.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 605; *Apophthegmata*, Daniel 8, PG 65, 160.

arguments.¹⁶¹ These questions concerned the understanding of the post-resurrection body, identified with the post-resurrection body of Christ. Some Origenists had claimed that following resurrection the body would be different—airy and round, not a body of flesh and bones. Moreover, these Origenist opinions were founded on Paul, seeming to prove also belief in the soul's preexistence and the ἀποκατάστασις. In his reply, Barsanuphius expressed an orthodox view of resurrection, though he was of the opinion that post-resurrection bodies would be stronger, luminous, and incorruptible. He likened the sharp transition in resurrection from the despicable, corrupt body to a luminous, eternal one to a simple farmer instantly becoming a general, or a deacon an ordained bishop.¹⁶²

In conclusion, it may be said that Barsanuphius' overall attitude to theological issues was negative. He regarded theology as inessential to the ideal Christian way of monastic life, which should be focused on a continuous process of self-examination and repentance. Moreover, he asserted, dabbling in theology distracts the mind, sets obstacles, and invites demonic machinations. It appears nevertheless that Barsanuphius was himself well versed in the important writings of ecclesiastical writers and in the central issues of the Origenist controversy. Although it is clear that the controversy had penetrated their circle as well, Barsanuphius and John were generally orthodox in their stance. Their essential attitude to theology seems, however, to have generated a tolerant attitude toward those holding non-orthodox theological views. Thus the series of questions about the Origenist polemic form a somewhat peculiar unit in the correspondence, indicative of a general rule of avoidance of theological discussion in the circle of Barsanuphius and John.

An exception to this rule may be seen in the questions relating to what could be termed the theology of monastic life¹⁶³—namely, the discussion of issues pertaining to the metaphysical goals of asceticism, similar to that of Abba Isaiah.¹⁶⁴ These discussions, however,

¹⁶¹ *Questions and Answers* 606.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 607. For an analysis of the Origenist content of the series of questions and answers regarding the Origenist controversy, see Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme*, pp. 124–28.

¹⁶³ See L. Regnault, "Théologie de la vie monastique selon Barsanuphe et Dorothee," in *Théologie de la vie monastique* (Paris, 1961), pp. 315–22.

¹⁶⁴ See Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 286–95; also chap. 5, below.

are quite brief and extemporaneous. In an uncharacteristic question, the monk Theodorus asked Barsanuphius about the origin of evil, about the evil powers of the devil and man and their origin. Here again Barsanuphius began by emphasizing that a monk had no need of this knowledge. The essence of his response was that the origin of evil—in the devil as well as in man—was in voluntary movement toward it. It was the devil himself who transformed his originally good power into an evil one.¹⁶⁵ Barsanuphius does not deal here with the question of whether evil has an independent ontological existence, but he seems to have held the view that it does, that its existence is dependent on demonic and human psychological reality.

Yet Barsanuphius' attitude to theology may have been somewhat more complex than has been indicated so far, tempering Brown's harsh judgement on the theological capabilities of holy ascetics.¹⁶⁶ As with other issues, Barsanuphius distinguished sharply between, on the one hand, ordinary monks and laymen, for whom he had formulated his negative stance regarding theology, and, on the other, veteran ascetics who had reached monastic perfection. The study of theology was reserved for the latter. Even though the redactor characterizes Barsanuphius' meditations on the letters of the alphabet as theological, it is noteworthy that at least in the case of his meditation on the letter *eta*—the only one included in the correspondence—he was apparently occupied primarily with issues pertaining to monastic teaching rather than with the classical questions of Christian theology.

The old men of Gaza, then, were holy men of a certain kind, molded by the peculiar monastic tradition of Gaza and the singularity of their personalities. They emerge above all as teachers of monks and laymen occupying a central place in their society, and their correspondence offers us a rare insight into a strange and bygone mentality. Barsanuphius did not die. Like the old soldiers in the poem, he simply faded away. On the eve of John's death, Barsanuphius retreated completely from the world and fell silent.¹⁶⁷ But the forces of centralization could not easily domesticate the holy man's charisma even after he had vanished into the dark depths of his monastic cell. The historian Evagrius Scholasticus wrote that

¹⁶⁵ *Questions and Answers* 127.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, pp. 72–73.

¹⁶⁷ *Questions and Answers* 599b.

people still believed Barsanuphius was living in his cell about fifty years later, though throughout the entire interval he had received no food and was not seen by anyone. According to the story, when Eustochius, patriarch of Jerusalem (552–63), refused to credit this and ordered a forced entry into the cell of the Old Man, a fire broke out and the assembled party was almost burned to death.¹⁶⁸ The Byzantine Church embraced the two inseparable holy men of Gaza, commemorating them in the holy liturgy.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Evagrius Scholasticus, *Hist. Eccl.*, 4, 33.

¹⁶⁹ On the reception of Barsanuphius, John and Dorotheus in Byzantium, see A. Rigo, “Barsanufio, Giovanni e Doroteo di Gaza a Bisanzio,” in Chialà and Cremaschi (eds.), *Il deserto di Gaza*, pp. 305–13. On the Byzantine cult of Barsanuphius and John, and on the later *Vita* of Barsanuphius and his cult in southern Italy, see Neyt, Introduction, pp. 27–32; Rigo, “Barsanufio, Giovanni e Doroteo di Gaza a Bisanzio.”

CHAPTER FIVE

COUNSELING THROUGH ENIGMAS

In the previous chapter we drew a portrait of Barsanuphius as a holy man and witnessed the emergence of his multifaceted charismatic leadership. The discussion that follows further rounds out this image by analyzing his quasi-divine self-awareness and status as reflected in a unique set of five questions and answers, described by the ancient redactor as a way of consulting the spiritual guide “through enigmas.”¹ From the *Correspondence* it is not possible to determine the extent to which cryptic language was employed in the Gaza monastic milieu as a whole. Barsanuphius, as we shall see, was not very enthusiastic about such language, a fact that might explain the scarcity of letters of this sort in the *Correspondence*. Although the redactor classified this entire group of letters as counseling “through enigmas,” two sorts of writing are distinguishable here: cryptic language and meditation on the alphabet. The latter, exemplified in *Letter* 137b, deals specifically with meditation on the letter ἦτα and discussion of it constitutes the second part of this chapter.

We learn about the first category—counseling through enigmas—from the case of a monk in the monastery of Seridus who had three thoughts (λογισμοί) and wrote his question to Barsanuphius “not in a clear manner but through enigmas” (οὐ σαφῶς, ἀλλὰ δι’ αἰνιγμάτων).² Keeping in mind the three topics on which he was seeking counsel, the monk inscribed a few letters of the alphabet. For each thought, he imprinted in his mind (ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ διανοίᾳ ἐνετυπώσατο) the letter that seemed suitable. Here the redactor provided a valuable piece of information—namely, the monk’s alphabetic code. For formulating in his mind a question concerning the subject of *hesychia* and total withdrawal into silence (περί τε ἡσυχίας ἀκριβοῦς καὶ παντελοῦς σιωπῆς τοῦ μηδενὶ παντελῶς συντυχεῖν), the monk used the letter *iota*;³ he used *kappa* for concerns about diet, asking through this

¹ *Questions and Answers* 40, 132, 133, 137, 137b.

² *Ibid.*, 132.

³ *Ibid.*

sign whether one should eat dried food and abstain from drinking wine; and he used *lambda* for asking about audacity. The immediate incentive for using cryptic language in the monastery was to bypass Abbot Seridus—Barsanuphius and John’s secretary—whose identity is disclosed only in the later letters. Seridus—the person who wielded direct authority in the monastery—was apparently not highly esteemed by this monk, he may have doubted the abbot’s wisdom concerning matters of daily life and been seeking a higher authority and more sophisticated counseling, so he used a known code to circumvent him.

In the next letter the same monk continued to address Barsanuphius, but this time asked his question neither clearly nor through enigma, as previously, but only by pondering in his mind (ἀλλὰ μόνῳ τῷ νοῦ ἐνθυμηθεῖς). Using an “alphabet of the mind,” the monk posed questions about sleeping problems, weakness of the soul, obtaining salvation, and prayer.⁴ The next three letters of the *Correspondence* constitute Barsanuphius’ responses; yet his answers too were given in riddles (such as “the first brings loss, the second is beneficial” and “turn not to the right hand nor to the left, until the two will be in agreement”), which, according to the redactor, induced embarrassment and frustration in the monk.⁵ In the end, Barsanuphius wrote an explicit answer to dispel these confusions.⁶ Though it leaves many questions unresolved, this letter provides a glimpse into Barsanuphius’ fundamental attitude to this way of counseling. At first glance, his stance on the use of cryptic language in the monastery seems somewhat positive. He declares that it seems to him good to receive—via God—the monk’s thoughts through enigmas and to answer him in the same way, since it produces in the rational soul, especially among the wise, “a spiritual rumination” (μηρυκισμὸν πνευματικόν). By delving into the enigmas, he says, we find abundant advantage in them. Nonetheless, drawing on Romans 12:16 (“Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate”), he strictly forbade the monk to express his thoughts thenceforth in enigmas; instead, he should bare his thoughts clearly through the intermediacy of another brother or write them down. Even if the monk acknowledged that he received charisma from God, it was not profitable,

⁴ Ibid., 133.

⁵ Ibid., 133, 134, 135.

⁶ Ibid., 136.

Barsanuphius maintained, to write or speak always through enigma; one should do so only when it was a necessity (ἀνάγκη). Yet he did not indicate what in this context should be deemed a necessity. By exercising lofty powers (διὰ ὑψηλῶν δυνάμεων), said Barsanuphius, both he and the monk were putting their humility at risk. He thus commanded the monk to do so only rarely. Ultimately, Barsanuphius complied with the monk's request and explained his earlier enigmatic answers: "The first letter [132] relates to you and to my son and servitor, Seridus, the two should be in agreement";⁷ the second letter [133] referred to the body and soul, which should be in agreement. The monk responded that from then on he would write and speak only through the intermediacy of the "lord abbot"! In other words, having at first used the code to circumvent his abbot, the monk ultimately became submissive and accepted Abba Seridus' authority.

What is important here is not so much that a cryptic language or code existed in monastic tradition in the sixth century, nor that such a technique was not known to everyone (in this case not even to the abbot), but rather the basic tenet underlying this method of approaching Barsanuphius—namely, the monk's confidence that the Old Man would be able to decipher the code he had formulated in his mind (ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ διανοίᾳ). Barsanuphius emerges here as a spiritual leader, one who had mastered the lore of the alphabet of the mind and sought primarily to maintain authority and hierarchy in the monastery. His bolstering of Seridus' status and his reluctance regarding consultation through enigma was perfectly in line with his philosophy of guidance grounded in obedience and humility.

The next story discloses the same stance: John of Beersheba recounted to Barsanuphius that one of the monks had asked him about his own thoughts "not clearly but through enigmas" (οὐ σαφῶς, ἀλλὰ δι' αἰνιγμάτων). John, who was hesitant about this mode of counselling, asked Barsanuphius whether the monk had acted rightly.⁸ Barsanuphius rejected "interrogation through enigmas," detecting in this case an individualism lacking discernment (ἰδιοσκοπία ἐστὶ μὴ ἔχουσα διάκρισιν)⁹ since, according to him, the signs (σημεῖα) are

⁷ Ibid., 136, p. 498.

⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁹ Chitty (*Barsanuphius and John: Questions and Answers*, p. 53) translated it as "individualism."

intended not for “believers but for non-believers” (1 Cor. 14:22).¹⁰ As one seeking to reduce ambiguity in all domains, Barsanuphius certainly could not permit himself to endorse the use of such an “alphabet of the mind,” which might create a mysterious atmosphere and bafflement concerning monastic discipline that could undermine authority within the monastery.

The issue of an “alphabet of the mind” is to be found also in the *Apophthegmata patrum*:

One day Abba Arsenius consulted an old Egyptian monk about his own thoughts. Someone noticed this and said to him, “Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education ask this peasant about your thoughts?” He replied, “I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant.”¹¹

What is interesting here is that the peasant’s inner life is represented as his alphabet. As scholars have remarked, the story provides evidence of “a pneumatic alphabet,”¹² “a new alphabet of the heart.”¹³ It is worth recalling in this context that Barsanuphius was well acquainted with Arsenius’ teachings and described him as one who had knowledge (*gnosis*) but did not show it.¹⁴ Cryptic language, a “spiritual alphabet,” was indeed rare in monastic literature, but it did exist in certain monastic communities such as the Pachomian monasteries, as clearly attested by Jerome:

The Thebans say that to Pachomius, Cornelios and Sourous an angel gave knowledge of a secret language, so that they might write to each other and speak through a spiritual alphabet, wrapping hidden meanings in certain signs and symbols.¹⁵

Jerome pointed out further that Pachomius corresponded with the fathers of other monasteries in such language and stressed the importance of knowing “all the elements of the spiritual alphabet.”¹⁶ Jerome, who translated the Pachomian letters from Greek into Latin in the

¹⁰ *Questions and Answers* 40.

¹¹ *Apophthegmata*, Arsenius 6, PG 65, 5, 88d-89a; 6, 89a.

¹² F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig, 1922), p. 72.

¹³ Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 229.

¹⁴ See, for example, *Questions and Answers* 45, 55, 119, 125, 126, 191, 256.

¹⁵ Jerome’s preface to *The Rules of Saint Pachomius* 9, in *Pachomian Koinonia* vol. II, p. 144.

¹⁶ *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. III, Letter 6, p. 67.

early fifth century, characterized their medium as “a spiritual language,” “a spiritual alphabet,” “a language given by an angel to both correspondents, and sounds that others are not able to understand.”¹⁷ Unlike the Gaza letters, whose code is revealed by the redactor, these letters are written in an alphabetic cipher whose arcane method is not as yet satisfactorily explained.¹⁸ Henry Chadwick ventured to predict that the cipher in Pachomius’ letters “will *never* be broken because its intention is not actually to communicate in the ordinary sense of the word; it has the purpose of being obscure, and therefore of surrounding its author with an aura of mystery and authority.”¹⁹ However, in the letters from Gaza the enigmatic language does emerge as a vehicle of expression and mode of communication. So the unequivocalty of Chadwick’s prediction seems questionable.

A few generations later, John Climacus (570–649) on Mount Sinai confirmed what every teacher knows: “Educators can distinguish between the programs of study suitable for beginners, for the intermediate, and for teachers. And we ought to ensure that we do not spend an unduly long time at the beginner’s stage, for it would be a disgrace to have an old man going to kindergarten.”²⁰ Thus he introduced to the readers of his *Ladder of Divine Ascent* what he described as “an excellent alphabet” and set forth the basic monastic ideals: “A—obedience (ὕπακοή); B—fasting (νηστεία); Γ—sackcloth

¹⁷ *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. III, letters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9A, 9B, 11A, 11B. Jerome (*Ep.* 50.3) also refers to the use of certain cryptic alphabet in his attack on Jovinian, criticizing the latter’s habit of circulating among the virgins’ cells and philosophizing on the “sacred letters” (*sacris litteris*).

¹⁸ The difficulty of deciphering this method was pointed out, for example, by H. Chadwick, “Pachomios and the Ideal of Sanctity,” in S. Hackel (ed.), *The Byzantine Saint*. Studies Supplementary to Sobornost 5 (London, 1981), p. 24; Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community*, p. 38; J. Goehring, “The Fourth Letter of Horsiesius,” in idem, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*, pp. 222–23.

¹⁹ Chadwick, “Pachomios and the Ideal of Sanctity,” p. 24 (emphasis added). For a serious attempt to identify an eschatological code deciphering these enigmatic letters, see C. Joest, “Die pachomianische Geheimschrift im Spiegel der Hieronymus-Übersetzung. Mit dem deutschen Text von Brief 11b des pachomianischen Schriftencorpus und dem Versuch einer Übertragung,” *Le Muséon* 112 (1999), pp. 21–46; idem, “Die Pachom-Briefe 1 und 2. Auflösung der Geheimbuchstaben und Entdeckungen zu den Briefüberschriften,” *The Journal of Coptic Studies* 4 (2002), pp. 25–95; idem, “Das Buchstabenquadrat im pachomianischen Briefcorpus,” *Le Muséon* 115 (2002), pp. 241–60.

²⁰ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 26, PG 88, 1017, Eng. trans. C. Luibheid and N. Russell (London, 1982), p. 232.

(σάκκος)” Each letter of the Greek alphabet corresponds to a central component of monastic life. But these terms do not begin with the corresponding letter of the alphabet. This code or set of signs, devised for beginners, epitomizes basic monastic discipline. For the advanced monk Climacus then proceeded to introduce the plan and signs of progress without the alphabetic code. The second alphabetic code, which he designated “a measure, rule and law,” is intended for those aiming at perfection in spirit and body; this set is characterized by its achievement of a higher monastic discipline. For instance, E—the indwelling of Christ, H—the outpouring of divine illumination, K—flight from the body, N—becoming a fellow worshipper with the angels.²¹ This code virtually represents the goal of monastic spiritual exercises, attained by those who are perfect. It depicts monastic life from the first steps of the beginner to his ascent to the dwelling place of mysteries (the letter O), becoming a custodian of holy secrets (the letter P), and gaining control of the body and nature (letters Y and Ψ). The use of cryptic language here is clearly pedagogical, making it easier to memorize the monastic ideals represented by such an alphabetic code. But it is not simply a program for ascetic progress from the beginning to perfection; rather, it is a set of symbols designating a new state of self-consciousness, which can be defined as mystical and spiritual reality.

The same pedagogical approach had in fact already been emphatically stated by Barsanuphius in his guidance to John of Beersheba:

From Alpha to Omega, from the condition of a novice to full growth, from the beginning of the way to its end . . . from becoming alien to the land perceived by the senses to becoming a citizen of heaven and an inheritor of the Land of the Promise perceived by the mind. Ruminant on the letters (ἐπιστολάς), and you will be saved. For you have in them, if you understand, the Old and the New Testaments: and understanding them, you have no need of any other book.²²

In this decipherment of the “alphabet of the mind” Barsanuphius’ charismatic leadership and quasi-divine self-awareness are manifest. This dimension is further illuminated in *Letter* 137b, which deals not with counseling through enigmas but rather with meditation on the letter *eta*. It seems, however, that the anonymous redactor introduced

²¹ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 26, PG 88, 1017.

²² *Questions and Answers* 49.

some confusion in his preface. The first part of the two-part preface tells about a father who had three thoughts and asked Barsanuphius about them through enigma by substituting each thought with a letter of the alphabet, since he wanted to hide his thoughts from the abbot. In this preface—almost identical to that of *Letter* 132—the abbot, Seridus, is mentioned by name. According to the redactor, Barsanuphius did not totally evade answering through enigma; but here again he forbade the father henceforth to address him in this enigmatic manner.

In the second part of his preface, the redactor relates that Barsanuphius wrote to this father, as well as to other old men, some advice and theological doctrines according to alphabetic order. We cannot but wonder at the redactor's confusing decision to link the two parts, since, as we shall see, there is no encoded secret in *Letter* 137b. The redactor may have arranged these letters consecutively because the same father is mentioned in both and because both are associated with the letters of the alphabet.

According to the redactor's explanation, in *Letter* 137b Barsanuphius speculated on the alphabet while applying and referring each letter to God (ἐν ἑκάστων στοιχείων εἰς θεὸν ἐκλαμβάνων);²³ he sequenced certain words with the same initial letter (*stoicheion*), such as *eta*, and then developed a detailed exhortation by speculating on each word. But as we shall see, Barsanuphius himself did not fully follow this method. The redactor explains that in order to exemplify Barsanuphius' interpretation to the whole alphabet, he chose Barsanuphius' speculations (τῶν θεωριῶν) on the letter *eta*. One wonders why the redactor decided to introduce only part of Barsanuphius' teaching on the alphabet rather than the whole treatise and, more importantly, why he chose this particular part of the composition. As we shall see, this seems to have been a deliberate choice.²⁴

²³ Ibid., 137b, p. 502.

²⁴ This is not the only occasion on which the redactor's criteria for selection are apparent. He deliberately selected topics that were central to the whole community. For instance, he acknowledged that in the rich correspondence of the Old Men and Seridus, there were many things to relate, but "for the brevity of the story, I shall recount only a few, sufficient to demonstrate the virtue of this man." And in what follows he portrays Seridus as "one who was perfectly obedient" (*Questions and Answers* 570c). The same policy was adopted in the group of letters concerning the Origenist controversy (*Questions and Answers* 600–607).

It should be stressed that *Letter* 137b stands apart: It is not a typical answer of the Old Man, nor is it, in a strict sense, an instructive letter, as are the others; it stands in stark contrast to the intimate tone and direct speech of the rest of the *Correspondence*. Barsanuphius' preoccupation with the inner life is generally marked by an unsophisticated way of thinking and a simple method of representation. But in *Letter* 137b we witness one of the rare instances in which he treated a topic in a theoretical and speculative manner, showing his knowledge and mastery of this traditional lore. The letter—carefully crafted and exhibiting religious piety—is written in the form of a prayer and in a spirit of pedagogy. It contains five sections, each formulated in a similar pattern: In the first he states the subject, in the next he moves to exhortation on it; he then gives signs by which one can discern whether he has achieved this stage. Each section ends with the sentence: “He who rejoices in the Lord is the one who has reached this level, the same as the one who will arrive there and the one aspiring to this.” This speculation on the letter *eta* represents the Old Man's spiritual *summa*. Barsanuphius was in fact laying bare a major puzzlement prevalent in monastic literature—namely, how a monk knows he has attained a certain stage of perfection. His speculation provided a set of signs for discerning the various stages. Why, then, did Barsanuphius represent his spiritual direction through signs and meditation on the letter *eta*? Our assumption is that in his speculation on the letter *eta* Barsanuphius, alongside his didactic scheme, was relating to his status and role as spiritual guide; using this meditative technique he was in fact strengthening his image as a quasi-divine guide.

As Barsanuphius centered his interpretation on *theopraxis*, it is not surprising that he began his exposition by stressing the important role of the spiritual guide: “*Eta* is *hegoumenos*. *Hegoumenos* is a guide” (Ἡτά ἐστὶν ἡγούμενος. Ὁ δὲ ἡγούμενος ὁδηγός ἐστι).²⁵ A guide, according to Barsanuphius, leads one toward the light, not to the inquiry of darkness; hence Barsanuphius—perceiving himself as a spiritual guide—provided the reader with a set of remedies against desires. This idea dominates *Letter* 137b, and in a series of opposites—light and darkness, truth and illusion, peace and combat, spiritual joy and

²⁵ The term *hegoumenos* can be translated here as designating specifically the monastic superior. See Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ἡγούμενος, p. 601.

sadness, humility and pride, mortification and repose²⁶—he defines the role of the *hegoumenos*, the monastic superior, as well as the precise way in which he seeks to guide his adherents.²⁷ This is epitomized in Barsanuphius' own words alluding to Matt 25:33: "He leads you to the right; do not be among those who are on the left."²⁸ Thus it is unlikely that Barsanuphius used the verb *hegoumai* (ἡγοῦμαι) here solely "as a pretext for enumerating all the fundamental dispositions that the monk has to acquire."²⁹ Rather, the emphasis in Barsanuphius' view is on the guide, who is the starting point of monastic life; all progress had to begin with finding a guide. Barsanuphius' self-awareness is decisive here: he saw himself as a guide counseling not only according to his cumulative experience, but rather as inspired by the Holy Spirit and speaking "from God" (ἀπὸ θεοῦ λαλεῖ);³⁰ the monk, in turn, entrusts his soul to the Old Man and through him to God.³¹ Barsanuphius' deliberate choice in starting his speculation on the letter *eta* with the idea of guidance is in harmony with his basic precept concerning spiritual direction—namely, that one should do nothing without advice, "A man without an adviser is an enemy to himself."³² The beginning of wisdom (σοφία), he said, is abstention from evil things; but one cannot abstain from them simply by not doing; without asking advice, without seeking counsel.³³ Nevertheless, in his teaching Barsanuphius drew a clear distinction between commandment (ἐντολή) and advice (γνώμη);³⁴ thus in certain circumstances he permitted the monk to follow his own will.

In the second section of *Letter* 137b Barsanuphius further enhanced the status of the *hegoumenos* by stating that the letter *eta* represents

²⁶ Pseudo-Macarius, for example, lists joy, peace, love, and truth as the signs accompanying divine grace. See *Homily* 7.3, ed. H. Dörries, E. Klostermann, and M. Kroeger, *Die 50 Geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*, Patristische Texte und Studien 4 (Berlin, 1964), p. 72.

²⁷ For a similar series of opposites, see Evagrius Ponticus, *On the Vices Opposed to the Virtues*, in R. E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford, 2003), Eng. trans., pp. 60–65.

²⁸ *Questions and Answers* 137b, p. 504.

²⁹ As has been argued by P. de Angelis-Noah, "La méditation de Barsanuphe sur la lettre *Hta*," *Byzantion* 53 (1983), p. 497.

³⁰ *Questions and Answers* 373, 462.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

³² *Ibid.*, 693. See also Perrone, "The Necessity of Advice," pp. 144–48.

³³ *Questions and Answers* 234.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 56, 64.

the right side of the Father (τὸ ἡτα ἡ δεξιὰ ἐστὶ τοῦ Πατρὸς), clearly alluding to the place of Christ on the right side of the Father (Heb 8:1–2).³⁵ It is worth recalling here Evagrius' view that the right is the side of divine knowledge, "the one who alone sits to the right of the Father is the only one who possesses the knowledge (*gnosis*)."³⁶ If one is to the right side of the Father, Barsanuphius declared, then he will not veer to the left, since "The right hand of the Lord is exalted: the right hand of the Lord does valiantly" (Ps. 118:16). He goes on to introduce the key elements threatening the monk's integrity, saying that those who are vigilant do not risk falling into gluttony (γαστριμαργία), fornication (πορνεία), avarice (φιλαργυρία), sadness (λύπη), despondency (ἀκηδία),³⁷ anger (ὀργή), temper brought on by the irascible part of the soul (θυμός), detraction (καταλαλία), hatred (μίσος), vainglory (κενοδοξία),³⁸ or pride (ὑπερηφανία). Here Barsanuphius was enlisting Evagrius' classic catalogue of eight *logismoi* and expanding it by adding a further three:³⁹ temper (θυμός),⁴⁰

³⁵ On Christ's place of honour at the right hand of God, see W. Grundmann, "δεξιός," in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eng. trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 37–40. For the background of symbolic associations of right and left in ancient Greek thought, see G. Lloyd, "Right and Left in Greek Philosophy," in R. Needham (ed.), *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification* (Chicago, 1973), pp. 167–86.

³⁶ *Kephalaia Gnostica* II.89, pp. 96–97.

³⁷ On the nature of the central theme of *acedia* (ἀκηδία) and its origin, see *Questions and Answers* 562–64. A distinction is drawn here between two sorts of *acedia*: physical *acedia* ensuing from fatigue, and *acedia* engendered by demons. Evagrius described in detail how the demon of *acedia* acts (*Praktikos* 12, ed. and trans., A. Guillaumont and C. Guillaumont, SC 171 [Paris, 1971], pp. 520–27. For an English translation, see J. E. Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, CS 4 [Kalamazoo, 1978]). Tears are a remedy against *acedia* (*Praktikos* 27, pp. 562–63). Evagrius also advised use of the *antirrhétique* method, which entails repeating psalms to expel *acedia*. The Old Men recommended invoking of the name of God to drive away evil thoughts (*Questions and Answers* 565). Along the lines of Evagrius, the Old Men instructed that during the struggle against *acedia* the monk should not leave his cell (*Questions and Answers* 563; Evagrius, *Praktikos* 28, p. 564).

³⁸ See also, *Questions and Answers* 261. Barsanuphius indicated to Dorotheus the attitude he should adopt toward others to overcome his vainglory.

³⁹ Evagrius, *Praktikos*, SC 170–171; *To Eulogius: On the Confession of Thoughts and Counsel in their Regard*, ed. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, pp. 310–33; *On the Eight Thoughts*, PG 79:1145–64, Eng. trans. in Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, pp. 73–90. For an analysis of Evagrius' theory of eight thoughts, see Guillaumont, *Traité pratique ou le moine*, SC 170, pp. 63–93; I. Hausherr, "L'origine de la théorie orientale des huit péchés capitaux," *Orientalia Christiana* 30 (1933), pp. 164–75.

⁴⁰ For the centrality of θυμός in Evagrius' teaching, see *Ad Monachos* 30, 35, 36, 98, 100; *Praktikos* 11, 15, pp. 516, 536. See also *Questions and Answers* 245 on the nature of θυμός.

detraction (καταλαλία), and hatred (μίσος).⁴¹ Barsanuphius was acquainted with Evagrius' system of eight generic thoughts (οἱ γενικώτατοι λογισμοί) and once likened them to "eight foreign nations" (τὰ ὀκτὼ ἔθνη τὰ ἀλλόφυλα).⁴² These *logismoi*, earlier termed "branches of evil" (κλάδοι τῆς κακίας) by Abba Isaiah, are systematized in his *Asceticon* and are also reduced by him to eight elements: fornication, lust, avarice, detraction, anger, jealousy, vainglory, and pride.⁴³ It may be noted here, however, that in some cases Abba Isaiah deviates from the Evagrian scheme, reducing the eight vices to seven.⁴⁴

With the aim of shaping the inner landscape of the monk on the basis of simple anthropology, Barsanuphius stated that God creates the soul and the body without passions (πάθη), but through disobedience the soul and the body fall into them;⁴⁵ uprooting the passions is possible by denying one's will.⁴⁶ The sign (σημεῖον) that a man is saved, said Barsanuphius, is that his soul is purified from all these *logismoi* and is able to take part in the heavenly liturgy—that is, "to sing with the angels of God" (συνάδειν τοῖς ἀγγέλοις τοῦ θεοῦ).⁴⁷ Though there is nothing mystical about the eradication of passions in monastic culture, it is represented here as a prerequisite for the monk's participation in the heavenly liturgy.

Barsanuphius goes on to speculate on the letter *eta* as the incorruptible sacrifice (ἦτα ἡ ἀφθαρτος θυσία ἐστίν)—namely the divine Son—that was offered for the life of the world. By consuming this sacrifice, Barsanuphius says, one truly sacrifices himself and is no more subject to spiritual corruption (τῆς νοητῆς φθορᾶς), since in Jesus Christ are destroyed all the deeds (ἔργα) of the devil, his passions (πάθη) and his thoughts (λογισμοί). This interpretation concludes with the promise of a mystical experience: if one has followed this way, examined one's inner self and found nothing of this evil, then "it is clear that he has died with Jesus, lived and sat in glory with him." Drawing on John 17:21 ("That they all may be one; as you Father

⁴¹ Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6–14, pp. 504–35. The Old Men regularly include hatred among the passions. See e.g., *Questions and Answers* 86, 97. Evagrius links anger and hatred. See *Praktikos* 20, 76, pp. 548, 664. Evagrius also associates hatred with wealth (*Ad Monachos* 16).

⁴² *Questions and Answers* 44.

⁴³ Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 28, p. 194.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.6, 2.10, 7.18–24.

⁴⁵ *Questions and Answers* 246.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 462.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 137b, p. 506.

are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us”), he asserts that believers who have purified their passions find themselves in the Son and in his Father in union (ἐν τῷ Υἱῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ Πατρὶ εἰς ἓν). Certainly, this is one of the spiritual cravings and ambitions of Barsanuphius—not surprising for a spiritual guide united to the souls of his disciples⁴⁸—who perceived himself in terms of Jesus Christ and once, in the context of remitting the sins of his disciple, declared “I sacrifice myself for your soul” (Ph 2:17).⁴⁹

In his next speculation on the letter *eta* Barsanuphius interprets it as the divine Son being the joy of the Father (Ἦτα ἡ χαρὰ τοῦ Πατρός ἐστίν), saying: “The joy of the Father is the Son who delivered the world on the Cross; stay then in freedom [from sin].”⁵⁰ The sign that one has reached this degree of perfection is that he adheres to his acquired freedom (from sin) until his last breath, and then, says Barsanuphius, “we are saints.” This interpretation characterized the emotional state of the mystic as an acute sense of joy. Elsewhere Barsanuphius alludes to the spiritual life as “the way to joy.” The Holy Spirit first comes upon a man and teaches him everything: how one should think about things on high, which, Barsanuphius pointed out to the monk, he cannot now do. Guided by this flame, the inspired one ascends to the first heaven, then to the second; he progresses until he reaches the seventh heaven, and there he can contemplate ineffable and terrible things (Κάκει τὸ θεωρῆσαι ἄρρητα πράγματα καὶ φοβερά), things of which those who have not reached this stage of perfection cannot be aware. This stage is reached only by those who are perfect, those whom God has found worthy. Only those who have entirely died to the world by suffering many afflictions (θλίψεων) can attain this degree of perfection.⁵¹

In his final speculation on the letter *eta* Barsanuphius chooses to link it to the Hebrew word *el* (ֵל): “*eta* is *el*; *el* is God” (Ἦτα ἥλ ἐστι. Τὸ δὲ ἥλ ὁ Θεός ἐστι). He further explains the Hebrew name Emmanuel by means of Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:23: “God is with us,” and then enquires whether God is with “us” or not. Here again Barsanuphius looks for “the sign that someone has reached this degree” of perfection, declaring that to be far from sin and alien to its master, the *diabolos*, means to have God always with you.⁵²

⁴⁸ On this notion of the union of souls, see chap. 7, below.

⁴⁹ *Questions and Answers* 111.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 137b, p. 508.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 137b, pp. 508–10.

Among the five interpretations Barsanuphius offers of the letter η, only two discuss words whose initial letter is η: ἡγούμενος and ἥλ. In other words, in his speculation, the letter *eta* has to some extent lost its linguistic character yet accumulated latent meanings; he deals primarily with the essence of the letter, rather than its linguistic role.⁵³ This technique of thought recalls the famous legend about Jesus and the alphabet. The author of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* presented Jesus as a pupil challenging his teacher about the meaning and power of the letters of the alphabet: “If you are indeed a teacher, and if you know the letters well, tell me the power of *alpha*, and I will tell you that of *beta* (εἰπέ μοι τοῦ ἄλφα τὴν δύναμιν, καὶ γὰρ σοι ἐρῶ τὴν τοῦ βῆτα).”⁵⁴

The key to understanding Barsanuphius’ intention in representing his spiritual teaching through meditation on the letter *eta* lies in the redactor’s statement that Barsanuphius wrote his composition in alphabetic order, applying and referring each letter to God (ἐκάστων στοιχείων εἰς θεὸν ἐκλαμβάνων).⁵⁵ It also makes clear the mechanism of this system of thought and the mystical dimension underlying its use. We are suggesting that by applying each letter (στοιχείον) to God, Barsanuphius was in effect divinizing his teaching. The term *stoicheion* has a long history in the literary genre of alphabetic speculation; it means a letter and a sound as well as an element of the universe, and since the world is composed of elements, the *stoicheia* create a meaningful universe. The letter-element⁵⁶ idea goes back to Greek philosophy,⁵⁷ Gnostic texts,⁵⁸ the New Testament,⁵⁹

⁵³ For a similar approach to letters of the alphabet in the late antique Jewish mystical treatise *Sefer Yetsira* (Book of Creation), see Y. Liebes, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetsira* (Tel Aviv, 2000), pp. 16–17 (in Hebrew).

⁵⁴ *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* 14:3, 6:19, ed. R. F. Hock (Santa Rosa, Calif., 1995), pp. 132–33. This text discusses the nature of the letter (φύσις). On the roots of this legendary story, see B. McNeil, “Jesus and the Alphabet,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1976), pp. 126–28. Irenaeus considered the story to be a “forgery.” See *Against Heresies* I.20.

⁵⁵ *Questions and Answers* 137b, p. 502.

⁵⁶ The term “letters-elements” (אותיות יסוד) appears in *Sefer Yetsira*, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁷ F. Dornseiff, *Buchstabenmystik* (Leipzig, 1916), pp. 14–16; idem, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*, pp. 14–16; G. Delling, “στοιχείον,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 670–87; P. Cox-Miller, “In Praise of Nonsense,” in A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality* (New York, 1989), pp. 496–99.

⁵⁸ For instance, the gnostic Marcus’ interpretation of the Greek alphabet. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I.14.1–5; Hippolytus, *The Refutation of all Heresies* VI.38–45.

⁵⁹ Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:8, 20.

and Jewish literature.⁶⁰ Following this widespread tradition Barsanuphius explored the idea of letter-element in his allegorical speculation on the letter *eta*, building on the ambiguity of the term *stoicheion*.⁶¹ He epitomized here the universe of monastic discipline and provided in clear language, devoid of any enigmatic configuration, a set of signs (σημεῖα) indicating that one has encountered the divine. Thus by relating all the letters-elements to God, he was presenting the divine dimension of his teaching embodied in this system of thought.

From Barsanuphius' technique of meditation it appears that he devoted no attention to the graphic form and sound of the letter *eta*; neither did he speculate about its numeric value (*gematria*),⁶² as elaborated in the *Epistle of Barnabas* ("the I is ten and the H is eight, thus you have Jesus");⁶³ nor is there any hint that *eta* is endowed with a concrete and immediate efficacy. The letter, then, has no intrinsic power; we are not dealing here with *logotherapy* or magic.⁶⁴ We should recall that the Old Man strictly forbade using incantation (ἐπιλαλία) and consulting sorcerers.⁶⁵ Barsanuphius' interpretation has no cosmogonic inclination such as is encountered in other Christian texts of this kind;⁶⁶ the supernatural and cosmological are not issues in *Letter* 137b. Nor has his interpretation of *eta* anything in common with Jerome's pursuit of this technique: In a letter to Paula in 384, Jerome elucidated the etymological and mystical

⁶⁰ *Otiot de Rabi Akiva* (Letters of R. Akiva), ed. S. A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 343–418; G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York, 1946), pp. 75–78, 133–38; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 21–30; Liebes, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetsira*, pp. 16–30.

⁶¹ On the ambiguity of στοιχείον, see R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 76–77.

⁶² The numeric value and graphic form of the Greek alphabet constitute an important portion of the Coptic treatise *The Mysteries of the Greek Letters*. The Coptic text with French translation was published by A. Hebbelynck as "Les mystères des lettres grecques," *Le Muséon* 1 (1900), pp. 16–36, 105–36, 269–300; 2 (1901), pp. 5–33, 369–414. On the Midrash on the graphic form in *Otiot de Rabi Akiva*, see pp. 11–16. The description of the letters of the alphabet in this Midrash is drawn from Ezekiel's vision of the chariot's animals (Ezek. 1:13–14). See also, *Midrash Rabi Akiva: Otiot kتانot, Otiot Gdolot*, ed. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot*, pp. 478–88.

⁶³ *Epistle of Barnabas* 8.

⁶⁴ D. Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions," *Helios* 21 (1994), pp. 189–221.

⁶⁵ *Questions and Answers* 753, 754–755.

⁶⁶ See, for example, the cosmogonic speculations in *The Mysteries of the Greek Letters*.

sense of the Hebrew alphabet.⁶⁷ Such interpretation should be understood, of course, in the context of his biblical interest; Jerome concentrated on divulging the hidden spiritual sense of the biblical text and, by means of this *scientia scripturarum*, demonstrating its Christian meaning.⁶⁸

Unlike Jerome's exegetical approach, Barsanuphius is perhaps best understood in the context of spiritual direction; his central concern is to advocate *theopraxis* teaching, articulating a common theme in monastic culture that served as a medium for indicating mystical experience. This is first and foremost a pedagogical oeuvre aimed at presenting a spiritual direction. Barsanuphius brought to light here the ancient fundamental concept that the alphabet carries meaning in and of itself, and that each letter represents a comprehensive idea. The second or third-century Coptic Gnostic *Gospel of Truth* clearly illustrates this concept:

Each letter is a complete thought, like a complete book, since they are letters written by the Unity, the Father having written them for the aeons in order that by means of his letters they should know the Father.⁶⁹

This linguistic concept has an archaic foundation in the Hellenized Mediterranean and in late antique Judaism.⁷⁰ Furthermore, mystical language is well attested in the Nag Hammadi corpus;⁷¹ it includes prayer texts in secret code, ecstatic invocations of God, and alphabetic language spelling out the secret name of God. Frederik Wisse was inclined to see a relationship between the widespread monastic

⁶⁷ Jerome, *Epistula*. 30, pp. 31–35. See also Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* X.5 on the Greek alphabet's origins in Hebrew. He interpreted the Greek letters according to the Hebrew alphabet and gave their meaning in Hebrew. Thus, e.g., *eta* is equivalent to the Hebrew letter η and stands for "the living" ($\delta\zeta\omega\nu\ \eta$, the Hebrew word for which begins with this letter).

⁶⁸ Jerome, *Epistula* 30.7, p. 33.

⁶⁹ Nag Hammadi Codex I, 3 (= XII, 2). On this passage, see D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, 1998), p. 254.

⁷⁰ See Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*; Cox-Miller, "In Praise of Nonsense."

⁷¹ F. Wisse, "Language Mysticism in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Early Coptic Monasticism I: Cryptography," in E. Lüddeckens, H.-J. Thissen, and K.-Th. Zauzich (eds.), *Enchoria: Zeitschrift für Demotistik und Koptologie*, IX (Wiesbaden, 1979), pp. 101–20; Cox-Miller, "In Praise of Nonsense."

use of cryptograms in colophons and graffiti in late antique Egypt and the use of vowel series and nonsense syllables in Gnostic works. This, in his view, is a further link between Pachomian monasticism and the Nag Hammadi codices.⁷² Yet all attempts to link these two movements have so far been convincingly rejected.⁷³ Symbolic writings and the mystical interpretation of Greek letters, however, are extant in Coptic monastic culture⁷⁴ and were long practiced in monastic circles in general.⁷⁵

The most illuminating example of the technique of alphabetic speculation in early literature is Zosimos' treatise *On the Letter Omega*. Zosimos, about whom we know very little, was an Egyptian alchemist from Panopolis (Akhmim, on the eastern bank of the Nile) active at the end of the third century or beginning of the fourth,⁷⁶ "a man of little conventional scholarship, who moved in an eclectic milieu compounded of Platonism and gnosticism together with Judaism."⁷⁷

⁷² F. Wisse, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt," in U. Bianchi, M. Krause, J. Robinson, and G. Widengren (eds.), *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (Göttingen, 1978), p. 438.

⁷³ In his preface to the paperback edition of *Pachomius: The Making of a Community* (pp. XIX–XXV), Philip Rousseau has convincingly argued against the various studies claiming a link between Pachomius and the Gnostic "library" from Nag Hammadi.

⁷⁴ On the holiness of languages and the evolution of the Coptic script, see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, pp. 248–56.

⁷⁵ One of the most appealing treatises speculating on the hidden meaning of words is the text known as *The Mysteries of the Greek Letters*. The text was probably composed in a Palestinian monastery no earlier than the seventh century. For these conclusions, see E. Amélineau, "Les traités gnostiques d'Oxford: Étude critique," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 21 (1890), pp. 176–294, esp. pp. 268–76. The starting point of the treatise is Revelation 1:8, 21:6, 22:13 ("I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending"). See *Mysteries of the Greek Letters*, pp. 21–25. According to the author of the treatise, the alphabet contains the hidden mystery of the universe since the creation of the world; in creating the world God performed 22 acts, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and wanted to signify the mystery of the salvation by Christ, which also encompassed 22 marvellous acts, the seventh letter, *eta*, signifying the appearance of light and circumcision of the flesh. See *Mysteries of the Greek Letters*, p. 29.

⁷⁶ On the biographical details on Zosimos, see H. M. Jackson, *Zosimos of Panopolis on the Letter Omega* (Missoula, 1978), pp. 1–7; G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 120–26.

⁷⁷ Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, p. 120.

In his treatise he speculates on the name Adam and reveals its symbolic meaning by breaking it up into its letters (*stoicheia*).⁷⁸ Accordingly these letters signify the elements that constitute the cosmos:

So, then, the first man among us is named Thouth, and among them Adam, a name from the language of the angels. And not only that, but with respect to the body the name they refer to him by is symbolic, composed of four elements from the whole sphere. For the letter [*stoicheion*] *A* of his name signifies the *ascendant* east, and air; the letter *D* of his name signifies the *descendant* west, and earth, which sinks *down* because of its weight; . . . and the letter *M* of his name signifies the *meridian* south, and the ripening fire in the *midst* of these bodies, the fire belonging to the *middle*, fourth planetary zone. So, then, the Adam of flesh is called Thouth with respect to the visible outer mould, but the man within him, the man of spirit, has a proper name as well as a common one.⁷⁹

As Patricia Cox-Miller has observed, "From this perspective, the alphabet is a kind of elemental grammar within which the entire cosmos presents itself in human, earthy terms, as the symbolic body of essential human being. By making these associations, Zosimos has not reduced the cosmos to the merely human but has rather divinized the human, since for him, as for Greek antiquity generally, the cosmos was divine, the visible body of the gods."⁸⁰ This identification of the letters of the alphabet with the elements of the cosmos, is a widespread phenomenon in the Mediterranean world of late antiquity and beyond.⁸¹ Barsanuphius was familiar with this way of thought, though it cannot be argued with certainty that he was directly influenced by the Egyptian alchemic corpus or by the philosophical Hermetica to which Zosimos belongs. However, he made his own configurations for this technique, applying it to his immediate social framework according to its need. Unlike Zosimos, Barsanuphius did not use the technique to divinize the human body; he used it to divinize himself as a spiritual guide and render his own teachings divine.

⁷⁸ Zosimos, *On the Letter Omega*, p. 29. This example is quoted and discussed in Cox-Miller, "In Praise of Nonsense," pp. 495–96.

⁷⁹ Zosimos, *On the Letter Omega*, pp. 28–29.

⁸⁰ Cox-Miller, "In Praise of Nonsense," p. 496.

⁸¹ See, e.g., Dornseiff's pioneering study (*Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*) on the mystical and magical dimensions of letters in ancient Greek thought, Gnosticism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Dornseiff first published his inaugural lecture as a short essay (*Buchstabenmystik*) in which he outlined his main thesis.

It seems, then, that speculation on letters of the alphabet in the monastic milieu is a late antique reflection of much older modes of thinking. From a literary perspective, the creativity and systematization revealed in *Letter* 137b recalls, for example, the famous *Midrash Otiot de Rabbi Akiva*—a late antique speculative treatise on the Hebrew letters—and *Sefer Yetsira* (Book of Creation). Though these Jewish works and *Letter* 137b share an interest in relating every letter to God, the axis of the Jewish works is cosmology, a dimension totally absent from Barsanuphius' speculation. His principle interest was to highlight his spiritual direction, all the while describing, with the aid of this meditation on the letter *eta*, a different state of consciousness defined by various aspects of encountering the divine.

Barsanuphius' propensity to divinize his teaching is also epitomized in the way he perceived his spiritual authority and the status he bestowed on his own instructions; he strove to rank them with biblical injunction and perceived them as no less significant than the Bible itself. To this end he used the spiritual exercise of meditation (μελέτη) not so much as a craft of thinking but rather as a dialogue with oneself, an ongoing endeavour to control the passions.⁸² Thus Barsanuphius constantly encouraged his supplicants to meditate (μελετᾶν) on the letters he had written them,⁸³ using the same verb (μελετᾶν) as that for reciting psalms⁸⁴ and reflecting on the Scriptures.⁸⁵ The things he wrote were sufficient, he maintained, to guide the monk from the beginning to the end. He advised meditating on them and memorizing them, since these things “contain the whole Bible.”⁸⁶ Relying on Proverbs 4:4 (“He taught me also, and said unto me, let your heart retain my words, keep my commandments, and live”), for instance, Barsanuphius—in a letter to John of Beersheba—expressed the wish that his sayings be anchored in John's heart and that John meditate unceasingly on the things he wrote to him. Sharpening his

⁸² On the definition of monastic meditation, see M. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 4.

⁸³ *Questions and Answers* 53, 103. See also *ibid.*, 239: “meditate these things” (1 Tm 4:15).

⁸⁴ In *Questions and Answers* 47 Barsanuphius wrote to John, who was struggling with his *logismoi*, to meditate unceasingly on Psalm 106.

⁸⁵ See also Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 27.7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 32, “ὅλην γὰρ ἔχουσι τὴν βιβλιοθήκην.” For this expression as denoting the Bible, see *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza: Correspondance*, SC 426, pp. 230–31, note 1.

claim through biblical authority, he ordered the monk to follow his instruction “according to what God said to Moses: ‘And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes’ (Deut. 6:8).”⁸⁷ In other words, Barsanuphius was here presenting his instructions as the new meditative phylacteries (*tefillin*), which the monk ought to bind to his heart. In the next generation, in the monastery of Dorotheus, we can trace the same approach to spiritual direction; Dorotheus advised the monks to meditate constantly on the sayings of the Old Men; then, he said, it will be difficult to transgress.⁸⁸

The persistent assurance that “if you meditate on my sayings without ceasing you will not fall”⁸⁹ transforms Barsanuphius’ teaching into an icon, devoid of rhetorical flourishes. This does not imply any neglect of meditating on the Scriptures; rather, it testifies to the almost canonic status of the letters and the exalted authority of the writer. The word of the Old Man was like the word of God. The letters of Barsanuphius are the new Holy Scriptures of those who choose the new *paideia*. It is in this matter, more than in any other, that Barsanuphius reveals his perception of himself as a supreme guide, an intimate servant of God.⁹⁰ He was, after all, speaking “from God,” deciphering the alphabet of the mind, and equating his teaching with that given by God to Moses. It remains to ask how far he could go. Did he envision himself playing a role in the afterlife and on the Day of Judgement? In a series of letters to the monk Andrew, who asked Barsanuphius to commend him to the Holy Trinity, the Old man answered that he had already done just that and, alluding to the eschatological passage in Matt. 25:31–34, drew a comparison between himself and “the great mediator Jesus,” who forgives sins from birth to the present.⁹¹ Restraining himself, however, Barsanuphius dared only to say: “Each of the saints bringing to God the sons whom he has saved says in a clear voice with abundant and great boldness, while the holy angels and all the heavenly powers wonder, ‘Behold I and the children whom God has given me’ (Is. 8:18; Heb. 2:13), and commends to God not only them but him-

⁸⁷ *Questions and Answers* 11, 19.

⁸⁸ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 60, 69, 189, SC pp. 248, 268, 506.

⁸⁹ *Questions and Answers* 236.

⁹⁰ See chapter 4, above.

⁹¹ *Questions and Answers* 115, 117.

self also. And then ‘God becomes all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28).”⁹²

Barsanuphius, then, was not attempting to develop a theoretical dimension of the technique of speculation on the alphabet. The novelty of *Letter* 137b lies in its new configuration of an ancient way of thought; he was applying an old method to represent his fundamental spiritual teaching in a new way. Barsanuphius’ total seclusion and invisibility to his acolytes were the most obvious *mis-en-scène* for a successful spiritual leader who perceived himself in such divine terms.

⁹² Ibid., 117.

CHAPTER SIX

THE USEFULNESS OF SIN

Monastic life, and especially hermitic monasticism, was often conceived of as a separation from the sinful reality of the external world and its allurements, and from the past corrupt existence of the individual monk, leaving behind the “old man” and being transformed into a “new man” by spiritual rebirth. Paradoxically, however, the new social and psychological conditions did not diminish the ascetic’s self-awareness of sin but actually intensified it and even turned it into a lifelong preoccupation. The new self-imposed seclusion, which perhaps caused what psychologists call shrinkage of the self, apparently did not also result in a corresponding shrinkage of the consciousness of sin.¹ Evagrius Ponticus, the first great theorist and psychologist of Egyptian hermitic monasticism, distinguished between sins of action and sins of thought. According to him, the eremitic reality neutralizes the possibility of sins of action on the part of the monk and limits him to sins of thought.² These mental sins are committed through the medium of the passions, which Evagrius classified into eight vices, later to become the famous seven deadly sins.³ It is this intensive preoccupation with the passions, notably via sexual fantasies, that so captivated Anatole France in his novel *Thaïs*.⁴ In fact, to some hermits their whole monastic life seemed one long penitential process of purification, infused with guilt and self-accusation for their past worldly existence as well as for the persistence—albeit on a new, mental level—of their state of sin.

¹ On asceticism as a phenomenon of self-shrinkage, see B. J. Malina, “Pain, Power, and Personhood: Ascetic Behavior in the Ancient Mediterranean,” in V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York and Oxford, 1995), pp. 162–77.

² Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos* 48; Evagrius, *Antirheticus*, Prologue, ed. W. Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus*, Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen; Philol.-Hist. Klasse, Neue Folge 13,2 (Berlin, 1912), p. 472.

³ Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6–14. On the development of the concept of major vices or sins, see A. Solignac, “Péchés capitaux,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 12, cols. 853–62.

⁴ For the literary sources of the story of *Thaïs*, see F. Nau, “Histoire de *Thaïs*,” *Annales de Musée Guimet* 30/3 (1911), pp. 53–112. See also B. Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*, CS 143 (Kalamazoo, 1987), pp. 76–84.

One of the great achievements of the Egyptian Desert Fathers was their introspective cultivation and their discernment of the thoughts and mental movements of the heart as a text requiring decipherment by a spiritual father—in other words, the discovery of a new alphabet of the heart.⁵ However, the collections of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers are mostly anecdotal and hagiographic, whereas the writings of Evagrius are markedly theoretical, systematic, and general. The writings of the protagonists of the monastic centre of Gaza stand in striking contrast to these. To quote Lucien Regnault, “What the Sayings of the Desert Fathers let us glimpse only in the form of transitory flashes, is here played out before our very eyes like a film.”⁶ This chapter examines some theoretical and practical aspects pertaining to sin in the thought of three generations of the monastic school of Gaza.

In certain logoi of his *Asceticon* Abba Isaiah discusses various dimensions of sin in the context of monastic life. According to Abba Isaiah the great challenge facing the ascetic is not so much solitary life in the monastic cell as the constant struggle against evil thoughts aroused by demonic machinations.⁷ This struggle involves a continuous process of obliterating and preempting from the stream of consciousness external memories that may give rise to passions (πάθος) and evil thoughts, such as the memory of family,⁸ people who had hurt the monk,⁹ or images forming in his mind as a consequence of erotic dreams.¹⁰ The monk must avoid forming social relations with his fellow monks that create a situation of dependence and captivity (αἰχμαλωσία)¹¹ and must eschew any external curiosity.¹² The guiding principle is to return immediately to the monastic cell when these occur in order to mourn one’s sins.¹³ Weeping for one’s sins (πένθος)

⁵ See chapter five above.

⁶ See L. Regnault in Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 233.

⁷ *Asceticon* 21.13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.28. On the danger of remembering past offences against the monk, see Evagrius, *Ad Monachos* 10, 13, 41, 74, ed. and Eng. trans. J. Driscoll, *The “Ad Monachos” of Evagrius Ponticus: Its Structure and a Select Commentary* (Rome, 1991), pp. 46–47, 52, 58.

¹⁰ *Asceticon* 4.30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.9; 30.4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.54.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.18; 3.32.

brings peace and harmony to the monk's soul.¹⁴ The general goal is to maintain a constant mental disposition of fear of God and innocence before God.¹⁵ However, this goal stimulates the cultivation of intense dynamics of sin, where practically every external situation creates an opportunity for committing a sin that is generally perceived as stemming from erroneous will (θέλημα) exploited and manipulated by demonic devices.¹⁶ This psychological process requires an unremitting vigilance so as to avoid errors or minor sins, now perceived as major sins, and to expose unconscious sins. For example, creating circumstances that arouse the monk to sin in itself constitutes a sin.¹⁷ Moreover, even if we are unconscious of any sin in ourselves, while examining ourselves we will discern within us sins perpetrated against us by others, and we must therefore perform penitence (μετάνοια) as if we ourselves had committed such sins.¹⁸ On the other hand, Abba Isaiah cautions against preoccupation with sins committed before the adoption of monasticism; one should regard them as unpardonable, because their remembrance may reawaken them.¹⁹ A similar stance is advocated by Basil of Caesarea,²⁰ while Evagrius argues that former experiences motivated by passions arouse passionate memories;²¹ however Evagrius, as opposed to Abba Isaiah, does prescribe the remembrance of and meditation on one's former life and past sins.²² Recollection of one's own sins also serves as a preventive meditative technique against preoccupation with the sins of others. It is actually a sin for a monk in his cell to neglect meditation of his sins in favour of studying Scripture before he is in full control.²³

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.1, 9.9. On the monastic ideal of compunction (*penthos*), see Hausherr, *Penthos*; Nagy, *Le don des larmes au Moyen Âge*.

¹⁵ *Asceticon* 9.10, 9.21.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4.75; 4.115.

¹⁷ *Asceticon* 4.33.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.32.

¹⁹ Ibid., 9.1.

²⁰ Basil of Caesarea, *Long Rules* 32.

²¹ Evagrius, *Praktikos* 34.

²² Ibid., 33. On the role of memory and the doctrine of forgetting sins, see also John Cassian, *Conferences* 20.11, ed. and trans., E. Pichery, SC 64 (Paris, 1959), pp. 70–71.

²³ *Asceticon* 4.10, 8.67, 23.5. On the dangers inherent in the study of Scripture, see *Apophthegmata*, Amoun of Nitria 2, PG 65, 128.

The monk must combat all forms of distraction (περισπασμός). This is termed the asceticism of the soul—namely, a constant mental concentration (νῆψις) and hatred of distraction.²⁴ Through an ongoing and constant process of consciousness of sin as a precondition for full detachment from the world²⁵—daily examination of one’s conscience, admitting one’s errors and seeking forgiveness,²⁶ prayers,²⁷ and the assistance of the spiritual father²⁸—scientific self-reform is at work. Performing everything with science (ἐν γνώσει)—that is, methodically and with correct knowledge—is a recurrent motif throughout the *Asceticon*, epitomized in the maxim “Happy are those whose works were done scientifically.”²⁹

The cornerstone for the spiritual culture of the monk is the power of discernment (διάκρισις) of various types of thoughts (λογισμοί) surfacing in the stream of consciousness.³⁰ Yet it requires continuous humility toward others³¹ and the suppression of self-will (θέλημα)³² and self-confidence³³—emotions that arouse the demons of enmity and sadness (λύπη)³⁴—plus a knowledge of the negative tendencies unconsciously active in the soul.³⁵ The ascetic must always see himself as a sinner, avoid judging others, and still his thoughts.³⁶ The proof that one’s sins are forgiven is a profound sense of equanimity, when nothing relating to one’s sin arouses any interior move-

²⁴ *Asceticon* 15.92, 16.57, 30.5b.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.33, 23.4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.8, 16.38. See also Dorotheus’ discussions on the examination of conscience, *Instructions* 3, SC 92, pp. 208–218; 13, p. 408; *idem*, *Letter* 2, SC 92, p. 504. For a recent discussion of the familiar topic of introspection and examination of the conscience, see R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford, 2000).

²⁷ *Asceticon* 25.9.

²⁸ On confession of sin in early monasticism, see H. Dörries, “Die Beichte im alten Mönchtum,” in *idem*, *Wort und Stunde*, vol. 1 (Göttingen, 1966), pp. 225–250.

²⁹ *Asceticon* 17.3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.55, 16.58, 16.114.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.15, 18.53.

³² *Ibid.*, 20.3, 26.11. Even the stimulation and desire to know things that do not strictly pertain to the monk prevent him from recognizing his own sins (*ibid.*, 23.6). For a theoretical discussion of desire, temptation, and resistance, see G. G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago and London, 1987), pp. 45–67.

³³ *Asceticon* 30.5c.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.15. On judgement of others in the *Apophthegmata*, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, pp. 123–32.

ment in the heart or, alternately, when that sin being recalled by someone else no longer provokes in the monk any memory of the sin.³⁷

Abba Isaiah likens the monk's struggle for perfection to mounting the cross, following the example of Jesus. This mounting of the cross, or self-crucifixion, also represents the culmination of the ascetic path—a recurring motif that receives special emphasis throughout the *Asceticon*.³⁸ The innocence of infancy is idealized as the state of monastic perfection, since the infant embodies all the virtues and qualities desired in a monk.³⁹ In fact, the monastic ideal is even described as a restoration of the state of “holy infancy” (ἁγία νηπιότης),⁴⁰ and the truly penitent monk regains the state of a baby sheltered at the bosom of his mother.⁴¹

Abba Isaiah's *Asceticon* comprises, therefore, mostly practical advice and instruction regarding the struggle against various sins, vices, corrupting passions, and demonic thoughts, alongside the fostering of monastic virtues. Abba Isaiah normally avoids theological dialectics and polemics, and even warns against dabbling in theology,⁴² yet his work also contains some element of theorizing speculation, which creates a solid basis and an ideological framework for the practical, sophisticated struggle against the multifaceted manifestation of sin within the ascetic psyche. Abba Isaiah's ideological concept of sin, traditionally combining soteriology and anthropology, reflects his Monophysite stance, which is entirely absent from his purely ascetic teachings. This explains why monastic leaders like Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheus, who in the sixth century accepted Chalcedon, would not hesitate to continue Abba Isaiah's monastic tradition; and his text was later admired by Chalcedonians and even by Nestorians.⁴³

³⁷ Ibid., 8.61.

³⁸ For example, *Asceticon* 8.55, 13.3, 4.17, 13.18. This motif already appears briefly in Cassian, *Institutions* 4.34–35, ed. and trans. J.-C. Guy, SC 109 (Paris, 1965). For a brief discussion of this motif in Abba Isaiah's *Asceticon*, see G. Couilleau, “Entre Scété et Gaza, un monachisme en devenir, l'Abbé Isaïe,” in Regnault and De Brock (eds.), *Abbé Isaïe, Recueil ascétique*, pp. 365–66.

³⁹ *Asceticon* 25.4.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.7.

⁴¹ Ibid., 25.19.

⁴² Ibid., 26.18. A tendency expressed in the *Apophthegmata* by Zeno, an older contemporary of Abba Isaiah in the Gaza area (*Apophthegmata*, Zeno 4; see above) and by Barsanuphius, *Questions and Answers* 600, 604, 694–96.

⁴³ See Chitty, “Abba Isaiah,” p. 70; A. Guillaumont, “Une notice syriaque inédite

The theoretical framework appears mainly in *logoi* 2 and 21 of the *Asceticon*. According to Abba Isaiah the foundation and goal of Christian asceticism is restoration of the original human state through imitation of Jesus and with his assistance. The natural state of humanity is the paradisaical state of Adam. With Adam's sin all his faculties were transformed into a state of counter-nature.⁴⁴ Thus the state of sin after the Fall is characterized as counter-nature (παράφύσις or τὸ παρὰ φύσιν), and sins are παραφύσεις.⁴⁵ According to Abba Isaiah, animals are superior to man in his fallen, distorted nature because they have preserved their original nature. To restore his natural state man must act like an animal, which has no self-will and no knowledge of its own.⁴⁶ The ideal, natural human will contained seven positive wills, or "positive passions." These natural wills and positive passions were distorted by the "enemy" into a shameful will containing the seven negative passions, or vices, which became the root of all sin.⁴⁷ This scheme enabled Abba Isaiah to introduce into his concept of ideal human nature and counter-nature the psychological classification of the passions. He thus created two parallel psychological systems: a positive psychology of will and passions according to nature, and a negative one of passions according to counter-nature. This positive psychology then becomes a vital tool in the ascetic warfare against existential negative mental forces. A residue of the natural positive passions somehow remained with us after the Fall and serves us to fight our mental demons in the quest to restore the sinless state of nature.⁴⁸ Anger according to nature, for example, checks the activity of counter-nature forces.⁴⁹ This, however, cannot be achieved without divine intervention. Jesus, in his body immune from sin, has restored the sinless original nature of Adam and opened the way to salvation—namely, to the restoration of counter-nature

sur la vie de l'abbé Isaïe," *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949), p. 360. It may also explain, however, why writers such as Zosimas and Dorotheus avoid citing Abba Isaiah by name. See Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza?" p. 40.

⁴⁴ *Asceticon* 2.1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.22, 17.7, 18.14.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.60.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.6, 2.10. Two notable sub-vices are the desire to teach, which nourishes anger, and forgetfulness, which is perceived as the mother of all vices, destroying all ascetic accomplishments.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.5–10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.8, 21.56. On the positive dimension of anger, see also Evagrius, *Praktikos* 24.

faculties to their natural state⁵⁰—by teaching the way of return to the state of original creation by means of asceticism.⁵¹ With the initial forswearing of the world, monastic asceticism is directed toward restoring the ideal circumstances of the original creation⁵² and the lost internal union between spirit, soul, and body under the mind's rule.⁵³ Only the passions separate the monk from the ideal nature of Jesus.⁵⁴ Progress is achieved when the passions are dead and harmony is reestablished among the various parts of human nature.⁵⁵ The interior union of human nature by a long process of overcoming the internal divisions of counter-nature in the state of sin becomes, therefore, the condition and expression of the restored union with God. Following Pauline terminology, Abba Isaiah regards this transformed human nature as the "new man" (ἄνθρωπος καινός).⁵⁶ Achieving full conformation with the nature of Jesus is the final goal of ascetic perfection.⁵⁷ The Monophysite implication of this concept becomes clear, as does Abba Isaiah's avoidance of the two natures terminology. A diphysite doctrine would render meaningless the central Christian dogma according to Abba Isaiah and empty ascetic life of its purpose.⁵⁸ By shedding all traits of counter-nature the ascetic achieves a virginal state and is worthy of becoming the fiancée of Jesus.⁵⁹

The correspondence of Barsanuphius and John incorporates the teachings of Abba Isaiah but displays a more marked type of concrete and practical spirituality at work. It includes many letters dealing with the monks' deliberations regarding various aspects of

⁵⁰ *Asceticon* 2.2–3, 8.60.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2.11.

⁵² On the Evagrian concept of first and second creations denoting primordial spiritual existence and corporeal formation, respectively, see Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. lxxvii.

⁵³ *Asceticon* 17.2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.3, 17.2, 23.11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.11, 19.3.

⁵⁸ For an analysis of the Monophysite ramifications of Abba Isaiah's concept of nature and counter-nature, see Keller, "L'abbé Isaïe le Jeune," p. 125. The *vita* of Abba Isaiah indicates a moderate Monophysite stance in regard to the question of the nature of the body of Christ (*V. Isa.* 11). See also a theological profile of Abba Isaiah in Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 286–95.

⁵⁹ *Asceticon* 25.25.

misconduct such as pride and vainglory, self-will and disobedience, avarice, anger, erotic temptations, sinful thoughts, restlessness, and social attraction, as well as potentially sinful behaviour concerning a variety of matters such as visitors, women and family, disease and medicine, food, prayers, and Scripture. The letters also touch on to some theological notions and questions of a more general character pertaining to sin. From all these we get a vivid impression not so much of what formally constituted a sin in this peculiar environment but rather of what constituted sinful behavior in the consciousness of these ascetics. Here we propose to illustrate this wide theme with only two of these aspects.

A series of about ninety questions to Barsauphius and John comes from their disciple Dorotheus. Many of these questions concerned pride and vainglorious conduct. Dorotheus actually took special pride in his correspondence and divulged its content to his fellow monks. This provoked a rebuke from Barsanuphius, who accused him of vainglory in revealing this content, to gain popularity with the monks.⁶⁰ Dorotheus was quite restless; he could not force himself to remain for long in his cell and was always looking for some activity. He returned to his cell each evening depressed, frustrated, and disappointed with himself.⁶¹ He admitted to John that he simply loved company and found difficulty in avoiding it, although he regarded this as a great weakness.⁶² Under the guidance of John and Barsanuphius he therefore embarked on a struggle against his negative mental propensities. Dorotheus asked Barsanuphius whether he should answer on the spot when asked a question, before having thought it over,⁶³ and about the pleasure he derived from a successful deed or answer, which made him feel wise. He sensed his weakness and begged Barsanuphius for the power of silence (ἡσυχία). In response Barsanuphius defines the power of being silent as overcoming the urge to speak and the pleasure deriving from it.⁶⁴ Dorotheus asked John how he was to behave when being praised, to which John answered that it was best to keep quiet.⁶⁵ However, Dorotheus argued

⁶⁰ *Questions and Answers* 260.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 307. Another monk was concerned by his tendency to get excited and speak in a loud voice in the company of other monks (*ibid.*, 565).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

in a responding letter, from his silence the one who praised him might consider the praise accepted and regard this as a manifestation of pride. The matter is more complicated than that, John answered. One could not anticipate what the reaction to his silence would be; it would have an edifying effect. In case of misunderstanding, however, he should assure his brother of meaning well.⁶⁶ Dorotheus similarly consulted Barsanuphius about his urge to speak to a particular monk whom he would have liked to please, out of fear that if he avoided speaking to him this monk might suspect his true feelings. The Old Man replied that the attraction to that brother was, in fact, the machination of the devil.⁶⁷

Dorotheus felt that he suffered from a marked propensity to talk to people and asked permission to avoid the company of other monks after his working hours in the infirmary.⁶⁸ But what was he to do when a useful suggestion came to mind? Should he speak out even though he was not asked about the matter? Should he report to the abbot on a matter concerning a senior monk?⁶⁹ Was he to answer the questions of a fellow monk when he did know the answer? Should he speak and warn about a useful matter?⁷⁰ John answered that the criterion for correct conduct is always a passionless action performed with humility.⁷¹ Dorotheus persisted: must he be silent when he sensed that talking would cause him satisfaction?⁷² In relation to talking to senior monks, John advised him to keep silent; even when asked, he should answer that he did not know.⁷³ In general, one should talk for the sake of others, particularly concerning offensive matters, and report them to the abbot, but keep silent for oneself.⁷⁴ Dorotheus did just that and reported a certain problematic monk to the abbot. However, he feared that this monk would become his enemy on discovering that Dorotheus has reported him to the abbot. John answered that this was a therapeutic measure, and one should not fear the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 280.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 258.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 286.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 288.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 289.

⁷¹ Ibid., 288–89.

⁷² Ibid., 292.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 294.

patient's reaction; eventually he would be grateful for it.⁷⁵ The situation, however, was apparently more complex, and Dorotheus was not entirely pleased with his action. He suspected that he might have been spurred by ulterior motives.⁷⁶ This is indeed a delicate question; one can never be entirely sure of the true reason for one's actions. John therefore insisted that Dorotheus report everything to the abbot, including the evil tendencies lying behind the report on the undisciplined monk; otherwise it was better to keep silent.⁷⁷ This and similar situations presented yet another moral conflict—a reported monk might consequently be hurt, so perhaps it was sometimes better to ignore, conceal, or dissimulate in order not to hurt him.⁷⁸ And what must be the attitude of a reported monk toward the one who reported him? Answer: he must believe that the monk who informed on him meant to act in his brother's favour, and treat him with love.⁷⁹ Of course all these complexities could have been avoided had Abba Isaiah's position been adopted here as well—namely, that if a monk learned of a brother's mistake he should keep silent about it. Abba Isaiah's brief instruction was probably not meant to cover all cases, but it can be seen as hinting at a growing emphasis on the coenobitic values of communal discipline and obedience.⁸⁰

Other questions by the monks concerned seemingly vainglorious conduct in public. Dorotheus, for instance, asked whether he should receive his portion of food in the communal meal, even if he had no need of it, so as not to appear to be refusing it with the intention of saving it for the patients in the infirmary.⁸¹ Further, he was in the habit of closing his eyes in concentration during public prayers and feared that in so doing he might be insulting his fellow monks.⁸² John's general advice was to act according to personal need but without pride.⁸³ Finally, Dorotheus admitted that there was still some pride left in him, because when he humiliated himself and prostrated

⁷⁵ Ibid., 297.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 299.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 301. On reporting the misconduct of fellow nuns to the abbot in Shenoute's monastery, see Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, p. 41.

⁸⁰ *Asceticon* 4.5.

⁸¹ *Questions and Answers* 323.

⁸² Ibid., 325.

⁸³ Ibid., 323.

himself before others he blushed a little. Should he, therefore, do so intentionally or just randomly?⁸⁴

Family, women, and Eros were other foci of monastic ethics. Indeed thoughts, memories, and longings for wife, children, and family left behind were a great cause of pain and consternation.⁸⁵ The pain of separation was expressed by monks in letters to the Old Men. Barsanuphius and John left no doubt as to the negative effect of these feelings. The worry of the monk for his family, declared John, would prevent his caring for God. A monk had to suppress his preoccupation with and memory of his family, which gave rise to this passion;⁸⁶ the pain of separation was only temporary.⁸⁷ Barsanuphius seems to have been rather harsher on this subject: the memory of family members, he maintained, came from the devil.⁸⁸ This stance seems to reflect a widespread monastic approach—albeit with various nuances—to the issue of relationship with the family, which was seen as a great obstacle and threat to monastic life. Basil, for instance, advocated minimal relations with family, talking to visiting relatives only through an intermediary monk trained in such conversations.⁸⁹ A similar position is attested in the Pachomian literature: a monk could only meet his visiting relatives at the gate of the monastery accompanied by another monk.⁹⁰ The Rules of Rabbula strictly forbade meeting with family relatives or visiting them, although a more moderate approach was advocated by the Rules attributed

⁸⁴ Ibid., 302.

⁸⁵ On the early Christian phenomenon of severing family ties and on anti-familial asceticism, see E. Clark, "Anti-Familial Tendencies in Ancient Christianity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1995), pp. 356–80. On the relationship between monks and their blood relatives and the total renunciation of their families in Pachomian monasticism, see P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 69–70, 151–152. For later Byzantine monasticism, see A.-M. Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), pp. 119–29. Profamilial attitude, however, did exist in certain monastic circles. See R. Krawiec, "'From the Womb of the Church': Monastic Families," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003), pp. 283–307.

⁸⁶ *Questions and Answers* 128.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 138.

⁸⁹ Basil, *Long Rules* 32.

⁹⁰ *Precepts* 53, Eng. trans. A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. II (Kalamazoo, 1981), pp. 154–55. On family visits to Pachomian monasteries, see the *Instructions of Theodore* 16–17, Eng. trans. A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. III, (Kalamazoo, 1982), pp. 102–3.

to Rabbula, enabling the abbot to authorize a visit to family.⁹¹ A more lenient, even somewhat liberal approach is attested in later Byzantine monasticism, where close relationships between monks and their families were often maintained and relatives were even allowed to live in the same monastery. Moreover, the monastery itself could be described in familial imagery.⁹²

One of the main tenets of asceticism is the renunciation of women, who came to be regarded as a form of demonic allurements. Sexual abstinence resulted in erotic temptations besetting the monk in his all-male, and secluded environment. However, monastic conditions did not necessarily imply a total segregation from women. Monks had opportunities to associate with women while performing errands for the monastery as well as when pious women visited the monastery. This reality—reflected already in the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah—confronted the ascetics with the need to deal with these borderline situations and define the line of demarcation in monk-woman relations. This reality apparently applied, perhaps to an even greater extent, to a whole group of lay devotees who wished to imitate monastic values and constantly sought spiritual guidance from Barsanuphius and John. We encounter a series of questions raised by a monk who was often sent on missions for the monastery. What should he do when invited by friends; was he allowed to dine in the company of women? The answer, quite expectedly, was in the negative⁹³—corresponding to Abba Isaiah's injunction that a monk invited to dine should never join a table where a woman is present.⁹⁴ Evagrius claimed that even eating with female relatives posed dangers,⁹⁵ and warned that when entering a village a monk should avoid coming near women and talking to them. Women were to him the "hook" (ἄγκιστρον) to catch the soul.⁹⁶ Similar rules were current in Syrian Christianity, where according to the Rules attributed to Rabbula, dining with women—including women of the monk's family—was forbidden. The Canons attributed to Maruta, however, seem to

⁹¹ *Rules of Rabbula* 13, in A. Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm, 1960), pp. 30, 83.

⁹² See Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery."

⁹³ *Questions and Answers* 354.

⁹⁴ *Asceticon* 3.77.

⁹⁵ Evagrius, *Praktikos* 96.

⁹⁶ Evagrius, *Ad Monachos* 83, p. 60.

advocate a more moderate stance, forbidding dining with young women when there is no other man present, and recommending not to talk much with them or read a book to them.⁹⁷ But how could a monk tell whether a woman would be present? The answer was that he must find out about it in advance. But what if he unexpectedly found himself in this situation without anticipating it? The answer was that he must apologize and leave.⁹⁸ Moreover, women prostitutes existed for the sake of seducing monks.⁹⁹ Abba Isaiah represented a relatively severe stance: A monk should not even look at the clothes of women, and if a woman greeted a monk on his way, he should answer her only in his heart, keeping his eyes down.¹⁰⁰ Somewhat earlier, Cassian, too, had adopted an extreme view, cautioning that even pious remembrance of holy women could transmogrify into a dangerous excitement.¹⁰¹ Aelianus, the abbot succeeding Seridus, relates in a letter to John that pious women and mothers of monks came to visit the monastery and stayed in an external, adjacent cell with windows facing the interior court.¹⁰² Aelianus asked whether he might speak to them through these windows? He further wrote John about his wife; he had left her in the care of relatives, but she did not care to stay with them any longer. Was he permitted to talk with her when she came for a visit and look after her affairs? John answered that it was permitted to accept visits of pious women and mothers of monks, and talk with them if necessary. Regarding Aelianus' wife, he should speak with her occasionally and take care of her needs throughout her life and the needs of the children until they reached the right path.¹⁰³ Another monk consulted John on whether to assist a widow by writing a letter to the governor concerning a certain injustice done to her. Would this be injurious to his ascetic discipline? John's answer was decisive: Do

⁹⁷ See the *Rules* attributed to Rabbula 27, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, p. 84. For the *Canons* attributed to Marutha, see *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁹⁸ *Questions and Answers* 354.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 461. See also Dorotheus' personal experience, *Instructions* 9.98. On fornication by monks, see A. Kazhdan, "Byzantine Hagiography and Sex in the Fifth to Twelfth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), pp. 131–36.

¹⁰⁰ *Asceticon* 3.78–79.

¹⁰¹ Cassian, *Conferences* 19.16.3. See also C. Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford, 1998), p. 74.

¹⁰² On the strict segregation of women visiting Pachomian monasteries, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, p. 151.

¹⁰³ *Questions and Answers* 595.

not help her—you are dead to the world; the dead do not worry about such matters.¹⁰⁴

The advice to pious laymen concerning women is not much different. In reply to a question as to how to behave when there is a need to talk with women, and whether to get involved in their affairs, John writes that relations with women bring only trouble. One must avoid talking to them as much as possible, even if their behaviour is impeccable. When there is no choice and one must talk with them, one must beware of them as of fire. In general, a person who devotes himself to God is better using a mediator in his dealings with women. He should avoid looking at them and lingering in their company—it is the devil's snare.¹⁰⁵

The more difficult, mental struggle, resulting from sexual abstinence, has an autonomous existence in the depth of the soul in one's most solitary hours. According to ascetic ethical psychology, it indicates a moral imperfection or sin which is conceived of as a demonic reality waging battle in the monk's heart. This is one of the most famous themes of Christian monastic tradition, going back to Antony. In the *Correspondence* we have some direct documentation of this persistent psychological reality. A monk who was seeing various images night and day, some accompanied by temptations, others not, turned to John for guidance. John answered that all these images were one and the same, appearing in different guises. They aimed to confuse his mind and cast doubt in his heart. As a remedy John prescribed forty-nine genuflections while citing the formula: "Lord, forgive me for the sake of your holy name."¹⁰⁶ Barsanuphius answered in the same vein a monk who complained about the appearance in his thoughts of the demon in feminine form. Thoughts, said Barsanuphius, are the prey of demons; the remedy is labor, which prevents thoughts.¹⁰⁷ We should not be surprised that John and Barsanuphius did not instruct these monks in the more sophisticated technique of discerning thoughts (*logismoi*) and demonic images, since in their opinion these meditative techniques were appropriate only to advanced or perfected ascetics.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 213.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 662.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 168.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 193.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 138, 431, 432.

Erotic images in dreams were often accompanied by what is referred to in the letters as “nocturnal movement” (ἡ κίνησις ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ) or “nocturnal events” (τὰ ὑπὸ νύκτα συμβαίνοντα)—namely, erotic stimulation.¹⁰⁹ Depending on their source, whether natural or demonic, these “movements” might be indicative of moral flaws and demonic presence.¹¹⁰ A monk asked John about his “nocturnal movements”—how to discern whether they are natural or demonic. John replied that without the nocturnal arousal and pleasure of the monk the devil could not continue acting.¹¹¹ On the other hand, such “movement” was natural if the soul maintained its calmness during this nightly experience, a disposition identified by Evagrius as proof of having achieved the state of *apatheia*.¹¹² Perfect ascetics, however, are immune from even suppressed natural arousal; they have become spiritual eunuchs.¹¹³ The monk consulted John further as to whether he should attend mass following such a night of erotic images and whether he should discuss these nocturnal appearances with other monks.¹¹⁴ The answer is instructive—he should discuss it, but not

¹⁰⁹ *Questions and Answers* 169.

¹¹⁰ According to Evagrius, dreams are the reflection of passions in reality. See *Praktikos* 55. Bad dreams and “shameful visions” (φαντασίας αἰσχροῦς) can also be caused by much food, whereas hunger prevents them (*Ad Monachos* 11). The link between dreams and nocturnal emissions is a commonplace of ancient medical literature, elaborating the distinction between natural and morally culpable emissions that arouse the feelings of shame and guilt. See J. Pigeaud, “Le rêve érotique dans l’antiquité gréco-romaine: Poneirogmos,” in *Rêve, sommeil et insomnie*. Littérature, médecine, société 3 (Nantes, 1981), pp. 10–23. For the early Christian background of the problem of nocturnal emissions and orgasmic dreams, see Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, pp. 81–83. For a comprehensive discussion of the whole issue of nocturnal emission in early Christian literature, see D. Brakke, “The Problematicization of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995), pp. 419–60.

¹¹¹ Mental consent to illicit pleasure is considered by Evagrius to be a grievous sin. See *Praktikos* 75.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 64.

¹¹³ *Questions and Answers* 169. On the liberation of the perfect ones from the natural incentives through grace and their transformation into a supernatural state, see Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 76. For a monastic anecdote on spiritual emasculation see John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow* 3, PG 87/3, cols. 2853–56. On the effects of an extremely ascetic dietary regime on sexual function, see W. C. Bushell, “Psychophysiological and Comparative Analysis of Ascetico-Meditational Discipline: Toward a New Theory of Asceticism,” in Wimbush and Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism*, pp. 553–75.

¹¹⁴ For a similar case of nocturnal emission as a possible obstacle to receiving the Eucharist, see Cassian, *Conferences* 22.6.1–4, and its discussion in Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 83.

with the young monks.¹¹⁵ That these nocturnal events were distressing and frustrating, and created a sense of moral imperfection and even pollution or impurity, is evident from the letters. One desperate ascetic went so far as to ask Barsanuphius for the impossible—a personal interview to help him overcome his nightly erotic fantasies.¹¹⁶

With Dorotheus, Gaza monasticism enters a phase of preservation and systematization. His lectures are vivid and attractive, his topics interwoven with anecdotes and personal experience; but there is hardly anything in them that is not traditional. Dorotheus' originality lies in his sober and concrete adaptation of this heritage to his coenobitic reality,¹¹⁷ hence the shift of emphasis regarding various aspects of ascetic life. We will present only one theoretical aspect of his teachings regarding sin, revealing some shift in emphasis and detail.

Following Abba Isaiah, but more emphatically so, Dorotheus wished to integrate his ascetic teachings on sin into a patristic theology of salvation history. This concern constituted the opening section of the first *Instruction* (On Renunciation), dealing with the sin of Adam. Dorotheus considered Adam's sin to be primarily one of disobedience, whereas the most vital virtue of coenobitic life was that of obedience, as repeatedly stressed by Barsanuphius and John and by Dorotheus himself.¹¹⁸ Adam was created perfect in his nature and in his mental and physical health. His existence in paradise was that of constant prayer and contemplation.¹¹⁹ In consequence of his sin he fell from a state that was in accord with nature (κατὰ φύσιν) to a state contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν), or counter-nature—the concept and terms are familiar from Abba Isaiah.¹²⁰ In this state of counter-nature man became a prey to sin (ἀμαρτία) and passions,¹²¹

¹¹⁵ *Questions and Answers* 170–71.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹¹⁷ See Regnault and de Préville's introduction, *Dorothee de Gaza*, p. 44; Regnault, "Théologie de la vie monastique selon Barsanuphe et Dorothee."

¹¹⁸ On the concept of obedience in Dorotheus, see T. Spidlik, "Le concept de l'obéissance et de la conscience selon Dorothee de Gaza," *Studia Patristica* XI (1972), pp. 72–78.

¹¹⁹ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 1.1. On the tendency in ascetic circles to regard the original sin not as sexual but rather as the result of greed and a desire for food, see Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 220.

¹²⁰ This concept and terminology appear also in the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John. See *Questions and Answers* 245.

¹²¹ *Instructions* 1.1.

and the sinful condition of humanity constantly worsened. Christ, as a New Adam, restored the complete, original, and sinless state of human nature and opened before man the possibility to liberate himself from the involuntarily sinful existence to which he was subject. From then on sin became a deliberate choice and not a predetermined condition.¹²² This purification and liberation from the past sinful existence was initiated by baptism. The inclination to sin persisted, however, and God therefore issued commandments to bring about the purification not only of sins but of the passions as well.¹²³ It is here, that Dorotheus introduces—in contrast to his predecessors Evagrius, Abba Isaiah, Barsanuphius, and John—his clear and sober distinction between sins and passions as the root cause of sin: “Sins constitute the gratification of these passions: when a man acts and brings into corporeal reality those works which were suggested to him by his passions. It is certainly possible to have the passions and not set them to action.”¹²⁴ This was indeed a relatively modest ascetic goal, one suited to the moderate circumstances of communal monasticism. It is here that we realize the ascetic orientation of Dorotheus’ concept of salvation history. Christ actually awakened our dormant inner man, or conscience—namely, the power of distinction (διάκρισις) between good and evil.¹²⁵ Dorotheus elsewhere specifies that this conscience (συνείδησις) was a divine gift bestowed upon Adam in paradise (against the literal meaning of Gen. 3:22), which constitutes the ideal natural law (φυσικὸς νόμος) as opposed to the later mundane written law.¹²⁶ It was precisely the aim of Christ to teach men how to discern the mental mechanisms of committing sin and how to cleanse the passions leading to sin through the cultivation of ascetic virtues.¹²⁷ The ultimate ascetic goal remained, however, even for Dorotheus, the complete extirpation of passions (ἀπροσπάθεια), which leads to the Evagrian ideal of serene *apatheia*.¹²⁸

¹²² Ibid., 1.4.

¹²³ Ibid., 1.5.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1.6.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 3.40.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 1.5.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 1.20. On the Evagrian ideal of *apatheia*, see Evagrius, *Praktikos* 2, 81, SC 170, pp. 98–112; *ibid.*, SC 171, pp. 498–501, 670–71. On the evolution of the concept of *apatheia* in early Christian literature, see M. Spanneut, “L’*apatheia* chrétienne aux quatre premiers siècles,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 52 (2002), pp. 165–302, esp. 284–300; M. Sheridan, “The Controversy over ΑΠΑΘΕΙΑ: Cassian’s Sources and His Use of Them,” *Studia Monastica* 39 (1997), pp. 287–310.

In conclusion, we cite the words of Folly regarding the apostles in Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*: "They detest sin, but on my life I'll swear they couldn't offer a scientific definition of what we call sin, unless they'd been trained in the Scotist spirit."¹²⁹ The ascetics of the Gaza region certainly came a long way in their existential science and definitions of sin, but they are still a world away from the academic preoccupations of scholasticism. We have seen some theoretical and practical aspects of the cultivation of the consciousness of sin, its application to various forms of monastic life, and its usefulness for achieving the ascetic goal, as reflected by representatives of three generations of Gaza monasticism between the mid-fifth and late sixth centuries. Their ascetic writings and teachings were embraced by Eastern orthodox and heterodox Christianity, and partly by Western Christianity,¹³⁰ and they have survived as a vital source of inspiration in contemporary Eastern monasticism—an indication of their profound insight into ascetic psychology and practice, which cuts through centuries of monastic experience.

¹²⁹ Trans. by B. Radice, Introduction and notes by A. H. T. Levi (London and New York, 1993), p. 91.

¹³⁰ See Regnault and de Préville's introduction, *Dorothee de Gaza*, pp. 90–97; Regnault, "Monachisme orientale et spiritualité ignatienne", pp. 141–49; A.-E. N. Tachiaos, "L'influenza dei padri di Gaza sul mondo Russo," in Chialà and Cremaschi (eds.), *Il deserto di Gaza*, pp. 321–334.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NECESSITY OF PENITENCE, *BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS* (GAL. 6:2)

Having witnessed in the preceding chapter the horrors of sin and the centrality of self-introspection, both in terms of the “usefulness of sin,” we can now approach the subject of its cure—namely, penitence—in terms of necessity.¹ Unlike the various spiritual exercises prevalent in monastic culture that originated in Greek philosophy, (μετάνοια) *metanoia*—which may be translated as repentance or penitence—surfaced in the early days of Christianity from a Jewish background as a natural result of its ethical dimension and its notion of self-purification.² However, in the monastic culture, which was engulfed in anxiety about sin and temptation, penitence attained an immense role that went far beyond its Jewish theoretical roots and practice. Moreover, penitence in monastic society did not take place within a sacramental framework as it did in the Church.³ Rather, it was an

¹ On μετάνοια as repentance and penitence, see Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, cols. 855–58. To date little study has been devoted to penitence in Eastern monastic literature. See H. Dörries, “The Place of Confession in Ancient Monasticism,” *Studia Patristica* 5 (1962), pp. 284–308; J.-C. Guy, “Aveu thérapeutique et aveu pédagogique dans l’ascèse des pères du désert (IV^e–V^e s.),” in *Pratiques de la confession: Des pères du désert à Vatican II* (Paris, 1983), pp. 25–40. For a general discussion and a few translated texts, see B. Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (Kalamazoo, 1987). On penitence in Basil’s writings, see W. K. L. Clarke (ed.), *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil* (London, 1925), pp. 46–52. For the Orthodox Church, see K. Ware, “The Orthodox Experience of Repentance,” *Sobornost* 2 (1980), pp. 18–28.

² On the development of the concept of repentance (*Teshuva*) in Jewish sources, see D. S. Goldstein, *Teshuva: The Evolution of the Doctrines of Sin and Repentance in Classical Jewish Thought* (Ann Arbor, 1974); E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 462–71; D. Flusser, “A New Sensitivity in Judaism and the Christian Message,” in idem, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 469–89; idem, “John’s Baptism and the Dead Sea Sect,” in idem, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (Tel-Aviv, 1979), pp. 469–89; G. Stroumsa, “From Repentance to Penance in Early Christianity,” in J. Assmann and G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 169–71.

³ The differing approach to confession in monastic tradition and in the Church is discussed in Dörries, “The Place of Confession in Ancient Monasticism,” pp. 284–91. For the distinction between “canonic penitence” and “daily penitence” in Western Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries, see E. Rebillard, *In Hora*

integral part of the monk's routine; it consisted in the deeds he was obliged to perform so as to reshape his way of life. In Evagrius' words, the monk needed to mend his soul and put it back on the right track.⁴ Thus penitence became closely associated with a constant examination of the monk's conscience (συνείδησις).⁵ The Desert Fathers required the monks to subject their deeds to frequent examination; some urged that this be done every morning and evening, others suggested every six hours, still others every hour.⁶ According to Dorotheus, the purpose of this scrutiny was to purify the conscience and then to repent any sins one might have committed.⁷ For the ascetic society, then, whose very existence was marked by the rhythms of sin and self-criticism, *metanoia* was an ongoing necessity; in the words of Mark the Monk in the fifth century, to do penitence is like eating, drinking, and speaking; it is an "obligation of nature."⁸ For those belonging to the "relatively enclosed school of self-improvement,"⁹ it served as a mechanism for change, bringing about such improvement. Moreover, penitence was a necessity in every stage of the monk's progress, even for those who had attained perfection.¹⁰ Hence, penitence became a component at the heart of late antique new *paideia*—a discipline that would shape the monastic way of life and ultimately transform its followers by creating a "new man."¹¹ This approach to penitence is clearly reflected in many

Mortis: Evolution de la pastorale chrétienne de la mort aux IV^e et V^e siècles dans l'occident latin (Paris and Rome, 1994), pp. 140–44, 160–64.

⁴ *Ad Monachos* 53, ed. H. Gressmann, TU 39.4 (Leipzig, 1913), p. 157. See J. Driscoll, "Gentleness in the *Ad Monachos* of Evagrius Ponticus," *Studia Monastica* 32 (1990), pp. 308–9. Evagrius also compared the penitent to a dead person who has come back to life or a sick person who has recovered. See Evagrius, *Admonition on Prayer*, translated from the edition of the Syriac version by S. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, 1987), pp. 68–69.

⁵ See Dorotheus' long discussion on conscience, *Instructions* 3, pp. 208–19; Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 4.98.

⁶ See, for example, *Apoph.* Nisterus 5, PG 65, 308. On self-examination in the evening and in the morning, common to almost all the philosophical schools in antiquity, see I. Hadot, "The Spiritual Guide," in A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* (New York, 1989), pp. 453–55.

⁷ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 11.117; 11.120, pp. 364, 370; *Questions and Answers* 291.

⁸ Mark the Monk, *On Penitence* 12, in *Treatises*, ed. and trans., G.-M. de Durand, SC 445 (Paris, 1999), p. 252.

⁹ A phrase coined by Rousseau, *Pachomius*, p. 158.

¹⁰ Mark the Monk, *On Penitence* 8, SC 445, pp. 242–44.

¹¹ On *Paideia* in late antiquity, see Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," pp. 3–5; Rousseau, "Ascetics as Mediators and as Teachers"; W. Jaeger,

treatises written in monastic circles in that period. For instance, Basil of Caesarea chose to open his *Moralia* with an exhortation on *metanoia*.¹² Likewise Abba John of Scetis, in the fourth century, established *metanoia* as one of the essential elements of monastic discipline.¹³ To the question "What is *metanoia*, or what does it mean to escape sin?" Abba Isaiah responded with a long discourse describing virtually the entire monastic way of life.¹⁴ Thus, according to Dorotheus, all the usual means of achieving *metanoia*—fasts, prayers, tears, compunction, almsgiving, and repentance—have a single objective: to transform the monk into a new man.¹⁵

A very optimistic view of salvation and a strong sense of solidarity inform the *Correspondence*: there is a remedy for every passion and a penitence for every sin.¹⁶ In addition to the body, the soul, and the Holy Spirit, all of which are involved in this process of change,¹⁷ the spiritual father, unsurprisingly, had a significant role to play. Here again, the *Correspondence* offers us a unique opportunity to see from close up intimate moments of interaction between master and disciple, all the while providing an interesting picture of the Old Man's notion of authority. Barsanuphius' image of a *pantokrator*—one who exercises his authority in all domains and touches on the deepest and most perplexing concerns of the inner life—is apparent also in his concept of *metanoia*, a concept founded on two closely linked

Early Christianity and Greek Paideia (Cambridge, Mass., 1962). Jaeger's conclusion that "it was Gregory of Nyssa who transferred the ideas of Greek *paideia* in their Platonic form into the life of the ascetic movement" seems slightly naïve (*ibid.*, p. 100).

¹² *Moralia* PG 31, 700b. On this text, see Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, pp. 228–32.

¹³ *Apoph.* John 34, PG 65, 216.

¹⁴ *Asceticon* 21.

¹⁵ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 15.160, p. 448. See, for example, *Questions and Answers* 730. On compunction, see Hausherr, *Penthos*. On prayers for forgiveness of sins in the *Apophthegmata*, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers*, pp. 105–6, 169; L. Regnault, "La prière continuelle 'monologistos' dans la littérature apophthegmatique," *Irénikon* 47 (1974), pp. 467–93. Various means of penitence are discussed by P. De Clerck, "Pénitence seconde et conversion quotidienne aux III^e–IV^e siècles," *Studia Patristica* 20 (1987), pp. 367–74.

¹⁶ *Questions and Answers* 226; Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 16.

¹⁷ One of the most comprehensive and impressive perceptions of the body and its role in the process of penitence is the first letter of Antony. For an English translation of this letter, see Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, pp. 197–202. See also Rubenson's analysis of this letter, pp. 52–53; 78–81; 85; Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 223–24. See the interesting role of the Holy Spirit in repentance according to Philoxenus of Mabbug, *On the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit*, ed. A. Tanghe, "Memra de Philoxène de Mabboug sur l'inhabitation du Saint Esprit," *Le Muséon* 94 (1981), pp. 39–71, En. trans., Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer*, pp. 106–27.

principles: obedience, *hypakoe* (ὑπακοή), and “unity of soul,” *homopsychia* (ὁμοψυχία). These principles are heavily emphasized in the *Correspondence* and seem to govern, in the eyes of the Old Man, the whole process of the monk’s penitence. Barsanuphius viewed himself as being one with his disciples, as then having “one soul” (ὁμόψυχος);¹⁸ he addressed them as “my twin-soul” (ὁμόψυχε).¹⁹ It is noteworthy that in patristic literature written in the fourth and fifth century, the term ὁμόψυχος usually designated a state of unanimity, “one mind,” general agreement on theological issues.²⁰ It is also used in theological discussion with allusion to John 10:30 (“I and my Father are one”), and in Philippians 1:27, and 2:2, to designate the solidarity within the community and its members’ behaviour “in the same spirit.”²¹ John Chrysostom, who thought that “nothing is worse than solitude,” used the term ὁμόψυχοι to designate companions closely bound to one another by the bond of charity, and the harmony and solidarity among those solitaries (μοναχοί), who have “fled from the turmoil of the marketplaces.”²² Barsanuphius, however, imbued the term ὁμοψυχία with a different meaning and made it comprehensible to us through his answer to one of the monks: “I speak to you as to my own soul, for the Lord bound your soul in mine.”²³ This perception of himself as being one with his disciples explains the sense of duty he felt toward his flock.²⁴ The notion of “one soul” seems to be one of the theological bases on which his spiritual authority rested, and its chief implication relates to the dynamic process of the monks’ penitence. If the monk wants to be saved, he should entrust his soul to the spiritual father and through him to God.²⁵ For instance, Euthymius, a recluse in the region of Gaza who maintained a lively correspondence with Barsanuphius, was convinced not merely that the Old Man had the remedy and

¹⁸ *Questions and Answers* 5, 7, 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93. See also *ibid.*, 57, 99, 105.

²⁰ See, for example, Basil, *Letters* 22, 65, 68, 70, 87, 92, 122, 129, 184, 210, 223, 266; Gregory of Nyssa, *Letters* 5, ed. and trans. P. Marav, SC 363 (Paris, 1990), pp. 154, 158; Evagrius, *To Eulogios* 1, PG 79, 1096; Callinicus, *Life of Hypatius* 48.9–10, ed. and trans. G. J. M. Bartelink, SC 177 (Paris, 1971), pp. 276–78; Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.7.50; Theodoret, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.12, 24.14.

²¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discourses* 6.4, SC 405, p. 130.

²² John Chrysostom, *In Joannem* 59.425.9; 59.426.25.

²³ *Questions and Answers* 68.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

the antidote for every passion²⁶ but also that he “has undertaken my soul.”²⁷ Nothing similar to Barsanuphius’ concept of “one soul,” expressing his responsibility and solidarity toward the monk, can be traced, for instance, in Evagrius’ or Basil’s ascetic writing. Though Basil asserted in his *Long Rules* that the superior is obliged to be vigilant on behalf of the souls of the brethren and must be “as seriously concerned for the salvation of each one as if he himself were to render an account for him,”²⁸ yet his approach is far from Barsanuphius’ notion of ὁμοψυχία. The Pachomian corpus alluded to such a concept; yet Pachomius, while willing to apply the “one soul” principle within the coenobitic setting, seems not to have been ready to extend his support to the anchoritic monk.²⁹ As noted earlier in this study, the Old Men had access to literary sources—such as the writings of Basil, John Chrysostom, and Evagrius—that inspired their ascetic theories; yet the origins of Barsanuphius’ particular concept of “one soul” remain unclear to us.³⁰

Barsanuphius looked askance upon a certain monk’s attempt to determine for himself the appropriate *metanoia*—namely, to live for a certain time in *hesychia*—viewing this as an expression of hubris. He urged the sinner to turn instead to him: “I am hereby giving you a commandment for salvation. If you observe it, I will bear the writ that is against you and I will not abandon you—not in this world or in the next. . . . Behold, then, I have taken from you the weight, the burden, and the debt (τὸ βάρος καὶ τὸ φορτίον καὶ τὸ χρέος).”³¹ Barsanuphius’ generous proposition to assume responsibility on behalf of the monk is certainly one of the most impressive gestures of this invisible Old Man and a further manifestation of his power. The spiritual father thus became an active partner in the

²⁶ Ibid., 62.

²⁷ Ibid., 68.

²⁸ *Long Rules* 25, PG 31, col. 985; *Short Rules* 19, PG 31, col. 1096b.17. For a discussion of Basil’s ascetic works and the formation of his *Asceticon*, see Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, pp. 190–232, 354–59.

²⁹ Rousseau, *Pachomius*, pp. 98–99.

³⁰ See, for example, the explicit references to Basil’s ascetic works in the monastic corpus of Gaza, *V. Petri Ib.* 135; *Questions and Answers* 289, 318–319; Dorotheus, *Instructions* 1.24; 3.42; 12.164. For John Chrysostom, see *Questions and Answers* 464. For Gregory of Nazianzus, *ibid.*, 604. On Evagrius’ *Kephalaia Gnostica*, see *Questions and Answers* 600.

³¹ Ibid., 239.

monk's process of penitence, and the monk, in turn, vowed total obedience to the spiritual father.³² The fathers of Gaza found the inspiration for this remarkable model of relationship in Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Barsanuphius referred frequently to this verse as a theological foundation for the way in which the community should express its solidarity, as well as for the responsibility of the spiritual father toward the monk.³³ The motif of sharing the burden of one's sins is expressed in Clement of Alexandria, who teaches that the true Gnostic seeks in his prayer to share the sins of his brothers in order to facilitate their confession and penitence. Origen similarly claims that the best take upon themselves the blames (*culpa*e) and sins (*peccata*) of their inferiors.³⁴ It should be emphasized that in Barsanuphius' view the role of "burden bearer" was a matter not of choice but of duty.³⁵ *Questions and Answers* 72–73 provide the most explicit and telling examples of this type of relationship. On one occasion Barsanuphius wrote to Andrew—who was living in solitude in the coenobium and had confessed one of his secret sins to him—that he had decided to intercede for him by taking half of the burden upon himself in the present life. Barsanuphius clearly did not take lightly this manner of intercession; as he himself wryly commented, his behaviour was that of one who has lost his head.³⁶ When Andrew, disappointed because Barsanuphius had not declared a complete remission of his sins, approached the Old Man yet again on the matter, Barsanuphius responded to his disciple with remarkable precision: "You did not understand what I said earlier: I will bear half of your sins. You should know that I am making you my partner." Only those who are perfect, said Barsanuphius, can take the whole burden of others on themselves; nevertheless, "if you like to throw everything upon

³² On the dependence of the monk on the spiritual father, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, pp. 26–87. On the relationship between the spiritual father and his disciple according to Evagrius Ponticus, see G. Bunge, *Geistliche Vaterschaft. Christliche Gnosis bei Evagrius Pontikos, mit einer Einführung von Wilhelm Nyssen* (Regensburg, 1988), Fr. trans. *Paternité spirituelle*, in *Spiritualité Orientale* 61 (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1994).

³³ *Questions and Answers* 483, 579.

³⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.80, ed. and trans. A. le Boulluec, SC 428 (Paris, 1997), pp. 244–45; Origen, *Homilies on Numbers* 10, ed. and trans. A. Mehat, SC 415 (Paris, 1996), p. 271.

³⁵ See the case discussed in letter 575, where Barsanuphius quoted Gal. 6:2 to persuade a monk to accept the role of the father.

³⁶ *Questions and Answers* 72.

me, through obedience, I accept this, too.”³⁷ Presumably, this concept of “burden bearer” was fundamental to the theology of leadership at Gaza. For instance, when the new superior Aelianus accepted the leadership of the monastery after the death of Seridus and asked how he should behave vis-à-vis the brothers, John answered that his role required compassion, and in this connection he quoted Galatians 6:2.³⁸

The “burden bearer” behavioural pattern can be plausibly traced to the Desert Fathers. A monk who had sinned went to see Father Lot and said: “I have committed a great fault and I cannot acknowledge it to the Fathers.” The old man said to him: “Confess it to me, and I will carry it.” The fallen monk had emphasized that his sins were grave: “I have fallen into fornication and I have sacrificed to idols.” The old man replied: “Have confidence; repentance is possible. Go, sit in your cave, eat only once in two days, and I will carry half of your fault with you.”³⁹ This remarkable example of intimate relationship between spiritual father and monk has other parallels.⁴⁰ It was a model adopted also by John Climacus, who perceived it in like terms: “Let your father be the one who is able and willing to labor with you in bearing the burden of your sin.”⁴¹ It is interesting to note here that there is no hint in Basil’s ascetic writings of the pattern of sin transference evidenced in the *Apophthegmata* and in the *Correspondence* as well as explicit also in other texts produced in the ascetic milieu.⁴² Basil referred to Galatians 6:2 in the same context of penitence, yet his interpretation of this verse differs from that disclosed in the corpus of Gaza. When asked about the precise meaning of this verse, Basil wrote in his *Short Rules*: “We take away and remove one another’s sins when we lead sinners to conversion (ἐπιστροφή).”⁴³ Mutual responsibility was important to Basil; but in

³⁷ Ibid., 73. For the prayer of the perfect for others, see *ibid.*, 249.

³⁸ *Questions and Answers* 579.

³⁹ *Apoph.* Lot 2, PG 65, 256.

⁴⁰ See *Apoph.* N. 346; N. 179; N. 180; N. 190; N. 255; N. 335; *Apoph.* Coll. System. V, 43, pp. 285–289.

⁴¹ *Ladder of Divine Ascent* 3, PG 88, 665d, Eng. trans. p. 87; *Ad pastorem* 5, PG 88, 1177b, Eng. trans. p. 234. See also K. Ware’s introduction to the English translation, pp. 37–43.

⁴² For a similar standpoint on vicarious repentance, see Mark the Monk, *Traité*s, SC 455, p. 88. See also *Mary, the Niece of Abraham of Qidun*, Eng. trans. S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 34–35.

⁴³ *Short Rules* 178, PG 31, 1201a–b.

his view, the extent of mutual assistance in the penitential process apparently went no further than this.⁴⁴ The monastic literature of Gaza, then, provides a picture of a much more intimate relationship between teacher and disciple than that which emerges from Basil's ascetic writings.

The direct result of such intercession was the attachment of the monk's fate to that of the father. Absolute obedience to the spiritual father, signifying obedience to God's will, was the most obvious manifestation of this attachment.⁴⁵ Abba Isaiah believed that a monk should feel at liberty to reveal to the father all his thoughts, whether good or bad, as well as his afflictions, desires, and suspicions.⁴⁶ "Divulge your thoughts to the father with liberty, do not be ashamed to recount all your thoughts to your superior."⁴⁷ A monk who showed negligence toward Abba Isaiah's precepts would not be permitted to live with him. Responding to Dorotheus, who beseeched him "to bear his sins," Barsanuphius agreed to assume this responsibility on condition that the monk acted in accordance with his commandments.⁴⁸ Barsanuphius elsewhere described the essential conditions on which he agreed to bear the sins of the monk: a state of humility, love, faith, and hope—but above all, obedience.⁴⁹ Without obedience, no help would be forthcoming from the spiritual father. Barsanuphius had a clear-cut definition of obedience: to cut off one's own will (Ἡ ὑπακοὴ κόπτει τὸ θέλημα).⁵⁰ Likewise, he identified the essence of the coenobitic life as doing everything according to the command of the abbot and not according to one's own will; this was the gist of the community and equality of the life of the brothers in the coenobium.⁵¹ Yet to cut off one's own will was no simple

⁴⁴ On Basil's general view of mutual responsibility see, for example, *Letter* 295, 22; *Moralia* 52; *Short Rules* 175, 177, 191. See also, Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, pp. 213–16.

⁴⁵ On obedience in the *Apophthegmata*, see L. Regnault, "Les *Apophthegmes* et l'idéal du désert," in J. Gribomont (ed.), *Commandements du Seigneur et libération évangélique. Études monastiques proposées et discutées à Saint-Anselme, 15–17 Février 1976*, Studia Anselmiana 70 (Rome, 1977), pp. 47–79.

⁴⁶ *Asceticon* 1.27, 4.3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.63. Shame is an issue seldom mentioned in the corpus of Gaza in relation to penitence; it was obviously not one that preoccupied the monks.

⁴⁸ *Questions and Answers* 270. See also *ibid.*, 553.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 231, 226.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 249, 250, 253.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

matter. To Dorotheus, who strove to achieve this spiritual state, Barsanuphius explained that it is effusion of blood: One should toil until death and consider his own will to be naught. Yet, choosing his words carefully, Barsanuphius acknowledged that this stage of progress is the mark of perfection, a stage that Dorotheus himself had not yet achieved. It is a stage unrelated to marginal problems or wealth; rather, it relates to thoughts (*logismoi*) and wills (*thelemata*).⁵² In his search for redefining obedience and draw its limits, Dorotheus then put his question in an absurd manner: Should one subject his will to the abbot even when it seems a transgression of God's precept? A monk should obey the abbot in everything, the Old Man responded emphatically, even if it seems to him to lead to transgression; because the abbot, in giving the commandment, assumes the responsibility of the monk. The basic assumption here is that the abbot knows how to take care of the monk's soul and that in any case the abbot's advice is according to God's will.⁵³ A true disciple of Christ, said John, no longer has the freedom to do anything according to his own will or his own choice.⁵⁴ Such statements on obedience belong to the banalities of monastic culture in general; yet the Old Men's principle of "one soul," and its implications in the concept of "burden bearer," was more strongly accentuated here than in other ascetic circles. Thus Dorotheus himself later emphasized the importance of the encounter between spiritual father and monk, quoting his predecessors: "To stay in the cell is half the journey, to go and see the elders, is the other half."⁵⁵ However, the search for salvation was essentially an individual matter, linked to man's responsibilities and deeds, as the Desert Fathers repeatedly stressed, the fallen monk must be fully aware of his sin and his struggle, despite their help.⁵⁶

The spiritual father was not the only source of help for the fallen monk. The other monks, especially those living close to the sinner, expressed their solidarity and participated actively in his penitence. As Evagrius had declared in his *Chapters on Prayer*: "It is a part of

⁵² Ibid., 254.

⁵³ Ibid., 288. See also, Spidlik, "Le concept de l'obéissance et de la conscience selon Dorothee de Gaza."

⁵⁴ *Questions and Answers* 308, 380.

⁵⁵ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 180, p. 488.

⁵⁶ *Apoph.* N. 170; *Apoph.* Antony 16, PG 65, 80; *Questions and Answers* 616.

justice that you should pray not only for your own purification but also for that of every man. Doing this, you will imitate the practice of the angels.”⁵⁷ In the *Apophthegmata*, the writings from Gaza, and the later works from the monastic centre at Mount Sinai, these instructions were fully realized in the monastic setting.⁵⁸ For instance, when a certain monk sinned by defaming his brother, the non-sinner urged his brother: “Let us do penitence *together* for two weeks; we will pray to God so that he may forgive us.”⁵⁹ In an atmosphere in which the involvement of the community, as well as that of the superior, in another’s penitence is seen not only as desirable but rather as an obligation, the question of public confession takes on a new dimension. Should a sinner confess his transgressions to all, or only to some? It was essential for Aelianus, as the newly installed superior in Gaza, to face up to the presence of sinners in his community, yet he had no idea how to react. Should he correct the sinner privately or publicly? The Old Man prescribed him a criterion: If the act was a serious one, then the abbot should reprove the monk in front of the other brothers, but not before alerting him about it.⁶⁰ The sole criterion proposed by Basil in this context was that confession of a sin ought to take place in the presence of those able to help the sinner.⁶¹ He viewed public confession as particularly important in cases of sinful thought, arguing that it encouraged the entire community to pray that the sinner be healed of his illness.⁶² Such an emphatic notion of the indispensableness of public confession is not easily discerned in the corpus of Gaza. Basil was persuaded that “Every sin must be made known to the Superior, either by the sinner himself or by those who have become aware of the sin,”⁶³ since

⁵⁷ Evagrius, *On Prayer* 39.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Climacus, *Ladder* 4, PG 88, 685.

⁵⁹ *Apoph.* N. 255; N. 346; *Apoph.* N. 179.

⁶⁰ *Questions and Answers* 581. Neither did Basil overlook the problem posed by the presence of sinners among his flock. See, for example, *Short Rules* 122, PG 31, 1165b.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 229, PG 31, 1236a; *ibid.*, 227, PG 31, 1233b–c; *ibid.*, 288, PG 31, 1284d. The ecclesiastical aspect of these rules and others is discussed in E. Baudry, “A propos du rigorisme de saint Basile: Gravité du péché, libération du pécheur,” in J. Gribomont (ed.), *Commandements du Seigneur et libération évangélique. Études monastiques proposées et discutées à Saint-Anselme, 15–17 Février 1976*, *Studia Anselmiana* 70 (Rome, 1977), pp. 158–73.

⁶² *Sermo Asceticus*, PG 31, 881b.

⁶³ *Long Rules* 46, PG 31, 1036a.

one ought not to keep silent when people sinned.⁶⁴ He viewed indifference toward sinners in terms of pollution (μολυσμός) and sternly condemned it.⁶⁵ His approach was based on the widely held belief that sin is not the concern of the sinner alone; for “unless the life of the sinner had been destroyed, his sin would not have rested upon himself alone, but also upon whoever did not display a righteous indignation toward him.”⁶⁶ Yet, in line with the Desert Fathers’ tradition, Abba Isaiah warned the monks not to discuss the sins of others “because it is death for you.”⁶⁷ Similarly, Dorotheus proposed that the sins of others should be ignored, arguing: “You saw the sin, but you are not aware of the repentance.”⁶⁸ It follows, according to him, that one who seeks salvation should not be concerned with the flaws of others.⁶⁹ By this instruction Dorotheus did not, of course, seek to forbid criticism where it was called for; but his intention was to avoid judging others.⁷⁰

The monastic school of Gaza and the desert tradition were characterized by strong reservations regarding long periods of penitence and extreme acts of asceticism.⁷¹ The view of the Desert Fathers is epitomized in the following statement regarding a prostitute who repented and then died shortly thereafter: “One single hour of repentance has brought her more than the penitence of those who spend much longer in repenting without showing such fervour.”⁷² Barsanuphius also admitted that in some cases, especially when the fallen monk was ill, a symbolic act of asceticism such as a reduction in the amount

⁶⁴ On mutual correction in Basil’s teaching, see Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, pp. 214–16.

⁶⁵ *Short Rules* 53, PG 31, 1117b–c.

⁶⁶ Basil, *De Iudicio Dei*, PG 31, 668c, Eng. trans. Clarke, p. 85.

⁶⁷ *Asceticon* 4; *Apoph.* Coll. System. IX, 12, ed. and trans. J.-C. Guy and B. Flusin, SC 387 (Paris, 1993), pp. 437–39; *Apoph.* Prior 3; *Apoph.* Poemen 64.

⁶⁸ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 6.74, p. 278.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.75, p. 278.

⁷⁰ On judgement of the other in the *Apophthegmata*, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, pp. 123–32; Dörries, “The Place of Confession,” pp. 294–95.

⁷¹ *Apoph.* John 40, PG 65, 220a; *Apoph.* Macarius 21, PG 65, 272b; *Apoph.* Sisoës 20, PG 65, 400b; *Apoph.* Poemen 12, PG 65, 325b. On the notion of death as a necessary element of penitence in Jewish and early Christian tradition, see S. Ruzer, “The Death Motif in Late Antique *Teshuva* Narrative Patterns: With a Note on Romans 5–8,” in J. Assmann and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religion* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 151–65.

⁷² *Apoph.* John 40, PG 65, 220a.

of food and drink was sufficient.⁷³ In this regard too, the Desert Fathers and the monastic school of Gaza deviated from the teaching of Basil who demanded long periods of penance.⁷⁴ Moreover, the monastic writings from Gaza dealing with penitence do not reveal any sign of institutionalization, a tendency visible in Basil's *Canonical letters*.⁷⁵ One could indeed argue that penitence as part of the monastic routine was flexible and was essentially left to the discretion of the spiritual father. The concept of "burden bearer" was one of the most remarkable mechanisms conceived for achieving this aim.

⁷³ *Questions and Answers* 257.

⁷⁴ Basil, *Letter* 217.84, LCL vol. III, p. 264; *Letter* 217.59, LCL, vol. III, pp. 248–51. *Letter* 199.18, LCL vol. III, p. 104. See also J. Gouillard, "Le temps du pénitent à la haute époque byzantine," in J.-M. Leroux (ed.), *Le temps chrétien de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge—III^e–XIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1984), pp. 469–77; B. Bitton-Ashkelony, "Penitence in Late Antique Monastic Literature," in J. Assmann and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Transformation of The Inner Self in Ancient Religion* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 192–93.

⁷⁵ The difference in approach and practice between Basil and the desert tradition on the one hand and the school of Gaza on the other is discussed in Bitton-Ashkelony, "Penitence in Late Antique Monastic literature."

CHAPTER EIGHT

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES: THE CONTINUOUS CONVERSATION OF THE MIND WITH GOD

What should a monk do to make progress? What spiritual exercises—inner exertions of thought and will—should he practice to attain perfection? These questions are repeatedly asked in the monastic milieu, including that of the monks of Gaza in the fifth and sixth centuries.¹ Despite the fact that without the help of the Fathers the whole ascetic pursuit would have seemed impossible,² several spiritual exercises were listed by the teachers in Gaza to mould their disciples and guide them to self-transformation: attention to oneself (προσοχή) and vigilance at every moment, watching the heart (νήψις), examining conscience (συνείδησις), meditation (μελέτη),³ self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια), a complete elimination of passions (ἀπάθεια), and humility (ταπείνωσις).⁴ We wish to discuss here an additional component, neglected by scholars—that is, the emergence of individual prayer in ascetic culture as a factor of spiritual progress. In the rich corpus from Gaza the theme of private prayer is elaborated with great clarity and appears to have been a major method of training for

¹ See, for example, *Barsanuphius and John, Questions and Answers* 196, 197, 202–203, 249, 351.

² *Questions and Answers* 124, 197, 225, 260–261. For this aspect in the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John, see Perrone, “The Necessity of Advice.”

³ *Melete* is the common term for meditation in Gaza. It commonly refers to meditation as a general state of concentration aimed at precluding distraction of the mind (Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 3.4; 16.74). This state includes various exercises such as reciting verses from Scripture (*Asceticon* 3.42; see also Evagrius, *Praktikos* 15, 69). However, it should be stressed that in the *Questions and Answers* the terminological distinction between prayer, reciting psalms, and meditation can often be discerned. See, for example, *Questions and Answers* 730. The term *melete* is also used in the corpus for designating continuous concentration on death. See *Questions and Answers* 639. See also Evagrius, *Praktikos* 52, pp. 618–20. Although meditation was a common practice in this monastic circle the sources do not elaborate on it beyond general remarks. See e.g., *Questions and Answers* 177, 241, 431. On the combination of unceasing prayer and meditation in Cassian’s teaching, see *Conferences* 10, and Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, pp. 101–3.

⁴ For the various requirements for attaining perfection, see, e.g., *Questions and Answers* 196, 200, 202–3, 207–8.

modifying the individual. The strength of the spiritual school of Gaza lay not in formulating a new liturgy or stipulating new regulations fixing the time and content of prayer. Its major contribution in this domain is to be found in its individual direction and help to each member in constructing his new self through the mechanism of prayer. Thus the axis of this chapter will be three private and spontaneous types of prayer:⁵ unceasing prayer (ἀδιάλειπτος προσευχή/εὐχή), pure prayer (προσευχή καθάρᾳ), and remembrance of God (μνήμη θεοῦ). Although such types of prayer were not new for Christians in the fifth and sixth centuries, in Gaza they gained new meaning, formulation, and function. They became the most radical method for cultivating the self, transforming its level, and ensuring an encounter with the divine.

As the title of this chapter suggests, its starting point is Pierre Hadot's groundbreaking study *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*.⁶ Hadot focussed on the notion in antiquity that true philosophy is a spiritual exercise—that is, first and foremost a way of life, an art of living leading to an altered level of the self.⁷ Drawing on the portrayal of monasticism as a *philosophia* depicted by Christian writers from the fourth century on, Hadot identified the components of the spiritual exercises listed in ascetic works as those prevailing in the Greco-Roman world. He based himself on various Greek philosophical schools (Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Platonism); on the writings of Philo of Alexandria, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Plotinus; and on monastic sources. The latter were mainly those whose provenance is the desert fathers of Egypt, Evagrius' *Praktikos*, Cassian's *Conferences*, and Dorotheus' *Instructions*.⁸ This is not the first time that

⁵ The term "spontaneous prayer," currently used to distinguish all sorts of private prayer from the fixed liturgy, was coined by F. Heiler in his phenomenological study *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*, Eng. trans. of the German original (1920), S. McComb (Oxford, 1937).

⁶ P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris, 1987), Eng. trans. A. I. Davidson and M. Chase, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1995). The quotations are from the English version.

⁷ Hadot defined spiritual exercise as: "Une pratique volontaire, personnelle, destinée à opérer une transformation de l'individu, une transformation de soi," in *Pierre Hadot: La philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris, 2001), p. 144. For the term "spiritual exercise," see *ibid.*, pp. 143–52. We wish to thank Jacques Schlanger for drawing our attention to this book.

⁸ Hadot, *Spiritual Exercises*, pp. 131–36.

a comparison of ancient philosophy with monastic texts has been made. Endre von Ivánka, for example, pointed out that the genre of κεφάλαια (chapters), in which Evagrius Ponticus wrote, existed already in the Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophical traditions, drawing on the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and on Porphyry's collection of excerpts from Plotinus.⁹ Hadot went beyond mere questions of literary form; he strove to show the concrete perspective of ancient philosophy, its existential dimension, and how this "art of living" was widely shared by Christianity. With his new approach to ancient philosophy Hadot provided an important key for deciphering monastic texts and contextualizing them in the philosophical tradition.¹⁰ However, as Hadot concentrated on the continuity between pagan and Christian spiritual exercises, he emphasized in particular their similarities, somewhat muting the distinctions between them; hence in his study the peculiarities of monastic spiritual exercises were to some extent passed over.

Michel Foucault, who adopted Hadot's framework for interpreting ancient thought,¹¹ has also discussed the subject of spiritual exercises, though using a different terminology—namely, *techniques du soi*.¹² According to him, technologies of the self permit individuals to effect, on their own or with the help of others, a certain number of alterations in their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and mode of existence, thus transforming themselves so as to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.¹³ Foucault

⁹ E. von Ivánka, "ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΑ: Eine byzantinische Literaturform und ihre antiken Wurzeln," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 47 (1954), pp. 285–91. For Evagrius Ponticus as philosopher, see A. Guillaumont, "Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le Pontique," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 181 (1972), pp. 29–56 (= *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien*, pp. 185–212); idem, *Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le Pontique*, Textes et traditions 8 (Paris, 2004).

¹⁰ For an application of Hadot's notion of spiritual exercises to Christian monastic texts, see J. Driscoll, *The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus: Its Structure and a Select Commentary*, Studia Anselmiana 104 (Rome, 1991), pp. 361–84.

¹¹ On the influence of Hadot's study on Foucault, see A. I. Davidson, "Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990), pp. 475–82.

¹² M. Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Boston, 1988), pp. 16–49.

¹³ Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," p. 18. On Foucault's growing interest in new Christian techniques for shaping the self, see fragments of Foucault in J. Carrette (ed.), *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault* (New York, 1999), pp. 41–47, 158–81. See also Hadot's criticism of Foucault's concept of "techniques of the self,"

for his part considered obedience and penitence to be new technologies of the self in monastic culture.¹⁴

It is quite striking, however, that in neither Hadot's *Spiritual Exercises* nor Foucault's analyses is the element of prayer counted among Christian spiritual exercises; indeed, prayer does not appear among the components of the Greek and Roman philosophers' spiritual exercises. This is not to say of course that prayer was not important in pagan society in general and among philosophers in particular.¹⁵ But it seems that in the first and second centuries there was a fundamental difference concerning the concept and function of prayer in the religious life of pagans and Christians: pagans used private prayer not so much for shaping the self but mainly for making requests to the gods and expressing their gratitude.¹⁶ In early Greek Christian thought it was Clement of Alexandria, followed by Origen, who laid the foundation for the conception of prayer as a state of mind (κατάστασις τῆς προσευχῆς), as a spiritual exercise and way of life, rather than as a text or a sequence of words uttered at a fixed time and place.¹⁷ It is noteworthy in this context that the very concept of progress (προκοπή)—a continuous ladder of ascent,

which he found too much centered on the "self": P. Hadot, "Reflections on the Notion of 'the Cultivation of the Self'," in T. J. Armstrong (ed.), *Michel Foucault Philosopher* (New York, 1992), pp. 225–32.

¹⁴ Hadot (*Spiritual Exercises*, p. 139), too, recognized penitence and obedience as two fundamental virtues.

¹⁵ H. S. Versnel, "Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer," in H. S. Versnel (ed.), *Faith Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 1–63; P. A. Meijer, "Philosophers, Intellectuals and Religion in Hellas," in *Faith Hope and Worship*, pp. 232–45; A. Méhat, "La prière dans le monde gréco-romain," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 12 (Paris, 1986), cols. 2202–2211. For a comprehensive study on prayer in the archaic and classical periods, see S. Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1997), where further bibliography is provided.

¹⁶ A point made clear in Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*, pp. 4–15. This statement is well attested in F. Chapot and B. Laurot (eds. and trans.), *Corpus des prières grecques et romaines*, vol. 2 (Turnhout, 2001). For the case of Marcus Aurelius' prayer (*Meditations* V, 7), see R. B. Rutherford, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius: A Study* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 91, 200–205.

¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.42.1, p. 146; Origen, *On Prayer* 12. For the history of the term κατάστασις τῆς προσευχῆς, see I. Hausherr, *Noms du Christ et voies d'oraison*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 157 (Rome, 1960), pp. 137–50. On Origen's tendency to spiritualize the Christian cult and prayer, see J. Daniélou, *Origène* (Paris, 1948), pp. 40–63. See also Evagrius' definition of prayer in *Chapters on Prayer* 3: "Prayer is a continual intercourse (ὁμιλία) of the mind (νοῦς) with God." On this definition of prayer and its philosophical roots, see A. Méhat, "Sur deux définitions de la prière," *Origeniana Sexta* (1993), pp. 115–20.

a pivotal idea in monastic culture in which the device of prayer was of prime importance¹⁸—played little part in the philosophical thinking of the early Hellenistic age.¹⁹ The idea of progress involves a sort of tension about the self, manifest in monastic sources but only implicit in Greek philosophy in general. For instance, the reader of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* cannot fail to be aware of its undercurrent of serenity.

An additional crucial factor accounting for the difference between pagan and Christian spiritual exercises, and closely related to the topic of individual prayer, is the sphere of demons, called by Peter Brown "the stars of the religious drama of late antiquity."²⁰ Though demons and evil are as old as humanity itself, the evolution of Christianity from the third century on seems to be marked by an accentuation of the role of the "evil powers" in religious life.²¹ The fading of the ancient dichotomy between good and bad *daimones*, widespread in Greek religion and philosophy and in early Christianity, and the emergence of a perception of demons as purely "evil powers," were among the most spectacular developments of late antique Christianity.²² The shift of *daimones* in the Christian discourse from the context of idolatry, as in early Christianity, to the realm of ethics and temptation was a long process and enormously significant in shaping the self in late antiquity. The demonology of Tertullian in

¹⁸ See, for example, Evagrius' treatise, *Chapters on Prayer*, where prayer as a spiritual exercise plays a hugely important role in the monk's spiritual progress. For the idea of progress in Evagrius' teachings, see J. Driscoll, "Spiritual Progress in the Works of Evagrius Ponticus," *Studia Anselmiana* 115 (1994), pp. 47–84.

¹⁹ For a marginal concept of progress in Greek philosophy, see E. R. Dodds, "The Ancient Concept of Progress," in idem. *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 1–25, esp. p. 18.

²⁰ P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150–750* (London, 1991), p. 54.

²¹ On demonology in Greek philosophy and in Hellenistic and early Christian literature, see C. Colpe (ed.), "Geister" (Dämonen), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, IX (Stuttgart, 1976), cols. 612–26, 640–68, 688–756; J. Daniélou, "Démon," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3 (Paris, 1957), cols. 142–89; P. Brown, "Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages," in M. Douglas (ed.), *Witchcraft, Confessions and Accusations* (London, 1970), pp. 17–45; J. Z. Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity," *ANRW* 16.1 (1978), pp. 425–39. See also G. B. Kerferd, "The Origin of Evil in Stoic Thought," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 60 (1977/78), pp. 482–94; J. Ries (ed.), *Anges et Démon: Actes du colloque de Liège et de Louvain-la-neuve 25–26 novembre 1987*, *Homo religiosus* 14 (Liège, 1988).

²² Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 53–54.

the West and of Origen in the East was obviously representative of the considerable change that had occurred. Tertullian showed himself to be a man of the past in this respect, since along with the Apologists he continued to embrace the topic in relation to paganism.²³ Focusing his interest on the idea of the *pompa diaboli*—the assembly of demons in the pagan city—he located the conflict between demons and Christians as occurring in public life, in the city, rather than in the inner life.²⁴ Origen on the other hand approached the matter from the angle of the spiritual life; essentially, the theme of spiritual combat propelled his angelology as well as his demonology. For him demons were a matter of internal struggle, one in which the soul was the arena of battle.²⁵ Evagrius Ponticus, his spiritual disciple, would at the end of the fourth century condemn them for their manipulative nature and their desire to blind the mind and deprive it of spiritual contemplation.²⁶ Although a comprehensive explanation for this change is elusive, it is easy to agree that theories of demons were an integral part of the ascetic complex. In the psychology of ascetic culture the devil and demons penetrated into the daily routine and took over the life of monks and nuns.²⁷ This empire of demons challenged man in late antiquity and, paradoxically, offered him a framework for perfection. In the words of Barsanuphius: “It is temptation that causes man to progress.”²⁸ The

²³ See, for example, Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 4, 24; *Apology* 22–23. For Tertullian’s demonology, see also Daniélou, “Démon,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3, cols. 174–80.

²⁴ J. H. Waszink, “Pompa Diaboli,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (1947), pp. 13–41.

²⁵ On Origen’s demonology, see A. Monaci Castagno, *Origene predicatore e il suo pubblico* (Turin, 1987), pp. 151–75; H. Crouzel, “Diable et démons dans les homélies d’Origène,” *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 95 (1994), pp. 303–31; idem, *Origène*, Eng. trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 211–14; idem, “Origène précurseur du monachisme,” in *Théologie de la vie monastique*, pp. 25–27; Daniélou, “Démon,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3, cols. 182–89.

²⁶ Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.47, ed. A. Guillaumont, *Patrologia Orientalis* 28 (Paris, 1958), p. 156. See also, M. O’Laughlin, “The Bible, the Demons and the Desert: Evaluating the *Antirrheticus* of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Studia Monastica* 34 (1992), pp. 201–15.

²⁷ J. Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, 1981), p. 149. Russell has claimed that in the third and fourth centuries the power of the devil seemed to grow as the security of life in the Roman Empire waned. On early Christian demonology, see E. Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York, 1984), pp. 105–42. For further bibliography on demons in the Greco-Roman world, see R. Valantasis, “Daemons and Perfecting of the Monk’s Body: Monastic Anthropology, Daemonology, and Asceticism,” *Semeia* 58 (1992), pp. 47–49.

²⁸ *Questions and Answers* 496, 499; Valantasis, “Daemons and Perfecting of the Monk’s Body,” pp. 59–66.

ascetic discourse called for a developed demonology against which to define itself and over which it could assert its repeated victories.²⁹ There can be no spiritual progress (προκοπή), Barsanuphius declared, without identifying the trickery of the demons.³⁰ “The envy of the devil (φθόνος τοῦ διαβόλου) blinds your heart” said Barsanuphius, “thus you consider the *logismoi* as good thoughts”;³¹ hence true spiritual labour according to him is to combat the *logismoi* that troubled the monk.³² And the ultimate technique for identifying the *logismoi* is by launching a prayer.³³ To his disciple Dorotheus he said: “If you want to progress, labour! Seek to remain with the saints . . . and not with the dirty demons.”³⁴ In a sense, to overlook the everlasting war against demons in the history of late antique ascetic culture means to disregard the perpetual horror and anxiety in which this society was caught up, as well as its delights once its enemies were vanquished.

To combat these diabolical assaults the spiritual leaders of monastic society developed a range of weapons. We maintain that the new perspective on demons in late antique Christian society was crucial to the emergence of private prayer as a tool of spiritual exercise in ascetic culture. Thus toward the end of the fourth century the subject of demons is given tremendous emphasis in works dealing with prayer—for instance, Evagrius’ treatise *Chapters on Prayer*—in comparison with earlier works on prayer such as those written by Tertullian and Origen. Evagrius was certain that “the angels and the demons approach our world; we do not approach their world.”³⁵ Although the bodies of demons have color and form, they evade the human senses. When they want to appear to man they transform themselves and resemble totally his body, without showing their own form.³⁶ In this ontological reality, Evagrius perceived the time of prayer as dangerous and as the privileged moment of the demons, since the ranks

²⁹ See A. Cameron, “Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity,” in V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), p. 158.

³⁰ *Questions and Answers* 202.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 236.

³² *Ibid.*, 103.

³³ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 256.

³⁵ *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.22. On Evagrius’ theory of demons, see J. Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, 1982), pp. 177–85.

of demons stand facing the person who is praying: "Beware, then, of the ambushes of the adversaries."³⁷ The demon, declared the Old Man, does not want the monk to pray; realizing that his maneuvers only reinforce the monk's tenacity, the demon prefers to cease pestering the monk.³⁸ Abba Agathon said: "Every time a person wants to pray, his enemies (ἐχθροί), the demons, want to prevent him, for they know that it is only by turning him from prayer that they can hinder his journey."³⁹ Or in the words of Evagrius: "The devil so passionately envies the man who prays that he employs every device to frustrate that purpose. Thus he does not cease to stir up thoughts of various affairs by means of the memory. He stirs up all the passions by means of the flesh. In this way he hopes to offer some obstacle to that excellent course pursued in prayer on the journey toward God."⁴⁰ Evagrius tried to understand why the demons wish to tempt the monk to acts of gluttony, impurity, avarice, wrath, resentment, and the other evil passions. "Here is the reason", answered Evagrius, "that the spirit (νοῦς) in this way should become dull and consequently rendered unfit to pray. For when man's irrational passions are thriving he is not free to pray and to seek the word of God."⁴¹ This psychological explanation was a prominent feature in the monastic culture, one that would influence and dominate its approach to prayer for many generations. Nevertheless, Evagrius was certain that "He who prays unceasingly escapes temptation,"⁴² and by true prayer the monk becomes the equal of an angel (ἰσάγγελος).⁴³

³⁷ Evagrius, *Admonition on Prayer*, in S. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer*, pp. 72–73.

³⁸ *Questions and Answers* 562. On the *acedia* in Evagrius' teachings, see Guillaumont, *Traité pratique ou le moine* 12, SC 171, pp. 520–27; G. Bunge and C. Joest, "Die bedeutung von *Akedia* und *Apatheia* bei Evagrius Pontikos," *Studia Monastica* 35 (1993), pp. 7–53. See also S. Wenzel, "Ἀκηδία. Additions to Lampe's Patristic Greek Lexicon," *Vigiliae Christianae* 17 (1963), pp. 173–76.

³⁹ Agathon, *Apoph.* 9, PG 65, 112b. In Pelagius' translation (PL 73, 941b) the enemies are the demons. Cf. Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 30. On demons and prayer, mainly in the *Life of Antony*, see J. K. Coyle, "Early Monks, Prayer, and the Devil," in P. Allen et al. (eds.), *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church* (Queensland, 1998), pp. 229–49. On the demons in the desert, see Russell, *Satan*, pp. 149–85. For casting out demons by means of prayer in the New Testament, see Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World*, pp. 1–32, 132–33.

⁴⁰ Evagrius, *On Prayer* 46. See also 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴² Evagrius, *Ad Monachos* 37.

⁴³ Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer* 113.

The monastic community in Gaza shared with Egyptian monasticism the obsessive sensitivity to the presence of demons.⁴⁴ Barsanuphius was certain that the devil goes about every where to vex by envy and by anger.⁴⁵ Scholars have pointed to the geographical relationship between demons and the desert.⁴⁶ Though the spiritual guides of Gaza adopted demonological theories previously prevalent in the Egyptian desert, the geographical aspect was now downplayed: the desert was no longer the ultimate location of demons, nor was the anchorite monk any longer the only favoured target of demons.⁴⁷ In Gaza, these undesired constant companions of monks were no longer confined to their ancient field of combat; their presence was now also pervasive in the urban monastic zone and its surrounding villages. It comes as no surprise, then, that in this corpus the dissimulations and manipulations of the demons permanently preoccupied both monks and laymen.⁴⁸ The appeal of the desert as a place of solitude and the attainment of perfection is attested in this circle, yet for Barsanuphius and John geographical landscape seemed to have no role in shaping the self; it was thus not deemed essential to withdraw into hermitic solitude in order to fight demons.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ On the intense focus on demons in Egyptian Christian literature, see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, pp. 273–77. On Antony's demonology and its possible roots in Origen's teaching, see S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, 1995), pp. 86–88, and *Letter VI*, *ibid.*, pp. 218–20. On Pachomius' terminology and imagery of demons, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, pp. 134–41. For an overview of this subject in the monastic literature, see A. and C. Guillaumont, "Démon: Littérature monastique," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3 (Paris, 1957), cols. 189–212. For a careful and comparative discussion on the demonology of Antony, Ammonas, and Paul of Temma, see D. Brakke, "The Making of Monastic Demonology: Three Ascetic Teachers on Withdrawal and Resistance," *Church History* 70:1 (2001), pp. 19–48. See also, M. R. Vivian, "Daniel and the Demons: The Battle Against Evil as Central to the Authority of the Monk," *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001), pp. 191–97.

⁴⁵ *Questions and Answers* 93.

⁴⁶ Brakke, "The Making of Monastic Demonology"; Guillaumont ("Démon: Littérature monastique," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3, cols. 190–91) stressed that demons attacked mainly the anchorite monk. For demonic powers as a locative category, see Smith "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers," pp. 429–30.

⁴⁷ On the case of Ammonas, who entertains the view that the demons inhabit the desert in particular and that one can fight them only when alone to argue the superiority of one form of the monastic life over another, see Brakke, "The Making of Monastic Demonology," pp. 39–40. See also Goehring, "The Encroaching Desert," pp. 281–96 (= *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* [Harrisburg, 1999], pp. 73–88).

⁴⁸ *Questions and Answers* 405–7, 414–15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

Before addressing the topic of prayer in the monastic community of Gaza, two general observations seem called for: First, it is not possible to deduce a general theory of prayer in the school of Gaza, since no systematic teaching on prayer is to be found in its corpus. There is nothing here similar to Origen's interpretation of the four varieties of prayer listed in 1 Timothy 2:1 (supplication [δεήσεις], prayer [προσευχάς], intercession [ἐντεύξεις], thanksgiving [εὐχαριστίας]); nor is there any theological or theoretical discussion such as Evagrius' and Cassian's,⁵⁰ nor anything like the wealth of hymns and homilies on prayer composed in the Syriac literature.⁵¹ However, the copious references to prayer in the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John show its centrality in the spiritual exercises of this community. John himself once stated that he wrote frequently about the subject of prayer.⁵² A glance at the *Questions and Answers* reveals that although prayer by the sixth century had enjoyed a long history in monastic culture, confusion on the matter was rife among both monks and laymen. Some of the questions simply reflect ignorance about the technique of prayer in this society, others an earnest search for a code of *politesse*.⁵³ The Gazan dossier on prayer covers a wide range of topics: the correct behaviour and bodily movements during the time of prayer;⁵⁴ the conduct of solitary monks during vespers, vigils, and night prayer;⁵⁵ and the length of prayer suitable for manual work. The Old Men had created various patterns of prayer—usually very short, relatively meager texts of simple structure.⁵⁶ In one case they provided exact formulas for petitionary and intercessory prayers,⁵⁷ in another a clear formula for evading demons.⁵⁸ They

⁵⁰ See Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer*; Cassian, *Conferences* 9–10 and *Institutes* 3.

⁵¹ See for example the selection of excerpts translated from Syriac by Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer*.

⁵² *Questions and Answers* 544.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 325, 712.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 570.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 85, 143.

⁵⁶ See, for example, *ibid.*, 364, in which a formula for petitionary prayer is given. *Letter* 438 offers three formulas for prayers: against temptations, against passions, and a general petition. See also *ibid.*, 440, 468. For an intercessory prayer, see *ibid.*, 544, 645, 706. In *ibid.*, 824, practical instruction is given concerning the required attitude for obtaining the abbot's intercessory prayer.

⁵⁷ See, for example, *ibid.*, 440. For the formula of an intercessory prayer, see *ibid.*, 544.

⁵⁸ For a text of petitionary prayer, see *ibid.*, 364, 384. See also *ibid.*, 249. On prayer as a weapon against demons in the Sahidic version of the *Apophthegmata*, see

were not embarrassed to deal with such prosaic questions as whether or not to close one's eyes in order to concentrate in the office.⁵⁹ A layman asked how he should behave when he found himself sitting with others near the church while people inside were reciting the *trisagion*: should he stand up and recite the prayer or remain seated with the rest?⁶⁰

The second observation is that Barsanuphius and John had no adherence to any specific spiritual law (νόμος πνευματικός).⁶¹ Though this community can easily be depicted as heir to the Egyptian monastic tradition, especially of Scetis, Nitria, and Kellia, the monastic tradition of the Gaza region had its own distinctive character. Several letters confirm that the monastic school of Gaza was well versed in the formative writings of the ascetic tradition such as those of Basil of Caesarea and Evagrius, and showed a lingering and deeply rooted spiritual affinity to the *Apophthegmata patrum*. Its teaching, however, did not adhere to any particular spiritual trend; its teachers, having to compete with earlier traditions, showed no hesitation in deviating from it in some cases.⁶² Whereas Evagrius Ponticus in Egypt and Diadochus of Photike (400–468) in Greece, for example, offered philosophical and sophisticated methods for reconstructing the self, the Fathers in Gaza elaborated a relatively simple scheme of spiritual progress, in which the vehicle of prayer was central.⁶³ In course of this *techniques du soi* the teachers of Gaza had one golden rule: to offer to each individual the advice suitable to his specific condition, physical or psychological. The basic assumption of Barsanuphius was: "God does not make demands of any man beyond his power."⁶⁴ To Andrew, who was asking about unceasing prayer and whether he ought to have a rule (κανών), Barsanuphius emphatically responded that a man living in solitude, especially one who is bedridden, has

J. Hartly, "Studies in the Sahidic Version of the *Apophthegmata patrum*." Ph.D. dissertation (Brandeis, 1969), pp. 188–91.

⁵⁹ *Questions and Answers* 325.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 712.

⁶¹ A term used by Marc the Monk (early fifth century) to designate monastic discipline: *Treatise*, vol. I, SC 445, pp. 74–129. See also *Pachomian Koinonia* III, p. 95.

⁶² See, for example, *Questions and Answers* 140, 143.

⁶³ For Diadochus' teachings, see his *Hundred Gnostic Chapters, Sermons on the Ascension and Vision*, ed. and trans. E. des Places, *Diadoque de Photicé, Oeuvres spirituelles*, SC 5bis (Paris, 1997), 2 ed.

⁶⁴ *Questions and Answers* 78.

no rule (κανόνα οὐκ ἔχει).⁶⁵ Barsanuphius refused, too, to give a rule for recitation of psalms and fasting because he thought that it would be useless and easily transgressed. Rather, each person needs a different rule according to his state of being and specific circumstances.⁶⁶ John gave precise instructions as to how a monk should pass each day: “You ought to sing psalms a little, recite by heart a little, search and watch the thoughts a little.”⁶⁷ But he stressed that the Fathers had no need for rules, since their entire day was regulated. Each monk ought to pray according to his ability.⁶⁸ This principle applied to a certain extent not only to individual prayers but also to the communal liturgy.⁶⁹ Hence the most distinctive mark of the spiritual direction in this community was the flexibility of its instructions.

Unceasing prayer

In a world extensively attended by elusive demons and temptations, resistance has to be practiced continuously. Hence the command in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray constantly” (ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε), which provided the textual basis for the concept of unceasing prayer, acquired a powerful new role in monastic culture. In early Jewish and Christian sources unceasing prayer was the affair of the angels, mentioned mainly in a mystical context, in the heavenly liturgy.⁷⁰ For the second-century author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* it was still a vague commandment that he mentioned only in passing.⁷¹ This

⁶⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 23, 28. See also *ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 85. Evagrius suggested rather a different schedule for the monk’s daily exercises: “The hours of the day will be for you as follows: The hour of reading, the hour of the office, the hour of prayer, and during your whole life the remembrance of God” (*De jejuniis*, ed. J. Muyldermans, *Evagriana Syriaca*, Bibliothèque du Muséon 31 [Louvain, 1952], p. 116).

⁶⁸ *Questions and Answers* 85, 126.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 241, 325, 334, 511, 736–737.

⁷⁰ See, for example, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, Eng. trans. G. H. Box (London, 1919), pp. 57–59; *Similitudes of Enoch*, 39:12–13; *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 12, ed. and trans. H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1972), p. 120. In this text (generally dated to A.D. 200), there is an account of the ascent of the martyrs to heaven in three stages. At the third stage they entered the heavenly city, where they saw four angels: “And we heard the sound of voices in unison chanting endlessly: Holy, Holy, Holy” (ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος).

⁷¹ *The Shepherd of Hermas, Parable 9*, ed. M. W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1999), pp. 488–89.

was radically changed in the ascetic milieu of the ensuing generations. Among the earliest writers who preferred not to blur or banally explain this precept is Clement of Alexandria, who used the idea to elucidate his very conception of the prayer of the Gnostic, that is, the true Christian. Perceiving prayer as a conversation (ὁμιλία) with God,⁷² Clement believed that the true Gnostic should not pray in temples, at a fixed time, or recite a prescribed text; his entire life should be distilled into this precept.⁷³ Origen, while adopting this understanding from Clement, tried in his treatise *On Prayer* to be more explicit, and offered the subsequent development:

I believe that the words of saints' prayers are filled with power, especially when praying with the Spirit they also pray with the mind. Then the mind is like light rising from the understanding of the one who prays. It goes forth from his mouth to weaken by the power of God the spiritual poison coming from the opposing powers and entering the governing part of the mind of those who neglect to pray and fail to heed the injunction to "pray constantly" (1 Thess. 5:17).... For the only way we can accept the command to "pray constantly" as referring to a real possibility is by saying that the entire life of the saint taken as a whole is a single great prayer. What is customarily called prayer is, then, a part of this prayer.⁷⁴

For Origen, then, the idea of the virtuous life was continuous prayer to God and fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 5:17.⁷⁵ Following the same line, Basil stated that one should not express his prayer merely in syllables but also by moral attitude of the soul and in virtuous actions: "This is how you pray continuously, not by offering prayer in words, but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so that your life becomes one continuous and uninterrupted prayer."⁷⁶ Basil, however, did not elaborate on the theme of unceasing prayer.

⁷² Clement, *Stromateis* 7.39.6; 42.1, SC 428, pp. 140, 146. For the same definition, see Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer* 3.

⁷³ *Stromateis* 7.35, 40, SC 428, pp. 128, 142; G. Békés, *De continua oratione Clementis Alexandrini doctrina*, Studia Anselmiana 14 (Rome, 1942).

⁷⁴ Origen, *On Prayer* 12, Eng. trans. R. A. Greer, *Origen* (New York, 1979), p. 104.

⁷⁵ On this aspect of Origen's *On Prayer*, see A. Monaci Castagno, "Un invito alla vita perfetta: Il ΠΕΡΙ ΕΥΧΗΣ di Origene," ed. F. Cocchini *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 57 (1997), pp. 126–34; L. Perrone, "Prayer in Origen's *Contra Celsum*: The Knowledge of God and the Truth of Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 (2001), p. 18.

⁷⁶ *Homily on the Martyr Julitta* 3–4, PG 31, 244a, 244d. Quoted in Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, p. 82.

This may be due to the different psychological atmosphere in his ascetic environment, where the ascetics—unlike those of the Egyptian desert—were not frequently confronted by demons. This sort of prayer became one of the most obvious weapons against demons and evil thoughts.⁷⁷ The *Life of Antony* is among the earliest examples of the growing tendency to employ unceasing prayer in this battle.⁷⁸ Evagrius Ponticus draws attention to the following very important fact:

We have received no command to work, to pass the night in vigils and to fast constantly. However, we do have the obligation to pray without ceasing . . . Prayer makes the mind (νοῦς) strong and pure for combat, since by its very nature the mind is made to pray. Moreover, prayer even fights without the aid of the body and combats the demons on behalf of all other powers of the soul.⁷⁹

It is noteworthy that Evagrius did not elaborate on “unceasing prayer,” and the term itself appears very seldom in his writings.⁸⁰ Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa, was fuzzy and indeterminate on this issue. He referred only in passing to unceasing prayer, in the *vita* of his sister Macrina, for whom labour was only an accessory to her ascetic life while meditation, unceasing prayer, and the continual singing of hymns were the principal activities by day and night.⁸¹ Nor do we gain a better understanding from the Macarian homilies, where the

⁷⁷ On unceasing prayer as a weapon against demons, see, for example, *Apoph.* N 66; N 409.

⁷⁸ *The Life of Antony* 5. 39, 51, SC 400, pp. 142, 240–42, 272–74; M. Marx, “Incessant Prayer in the *Vita Antonii*,” *Studia Anselmiana* 38 (1956), pp. 108–35; Coyle, “Early Monks, Prayer, and the Devil”; Daniélou (“Démon,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 3, cols. 142–89) was too quick to assert that in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Mandate XI, 14–17) “On trouve ici le thème de la puissance de la prière pour chasser les démons”; for in the Greek text published by Holmes (*The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 408), the verb “to pray” does not appear.

⁷⁹ Evagrius, *Praktikos* 49. Cf. *Ad Monachos* 37. On the nature and role of the νοῦς in Evagrius’ writings, see D. Bertrant, “Force et faiblesse du Νοῦς chez Évagre le Pontique,” *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001), pp. 10–23. See also *Praktikos* 69.

⁸⁰ Evagrius referred to it in his instructions to the nuns in a general exhortation to pray unceasingly and remember Christ. See *Ad virginem* 5, ed. H. Gressmann TU 39 (Berlin, 1919), p. 146; *Letter* 19, ed. Frankenberg, p. 578. In his work *Admonitio paraenetica* 3 (Syriac text in *Evagriana Syriaca*, p. 126), he asserted that unceasing prayer day and night sustains the remembrance of God in the soul. See also G. Bunge, “‘Priez sans cesse’: Aux origines de la prière hésychaste,” *Studia Monastica* 30 (1988), pp. 7–16.

⁸¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae* 11, ed. and trans. P. Maraval, SC 178 (Paris, 1971), p. 178.

author related to the topic in general terms and advocated constant perseverance in prayer as essential to spiritual progress.⁸² For Nilus in the fifth century, however, unceasing prayer was perceived merely as “apparent prayer,” since according to him it is not possible to pray indefinitely.⁸³ By his forthright statement, Nilus expressed the main psychological problem stemming from the ideal of unceasing prayer. After all, “How can one pray unceasingly? Since the spirit becomes tired of God’s labour?” This question, preserved in the *Apophthegmata*, pointed to the technical and psychological problems inherent in this precept.⁸⁴ The prevalent tendency in the desert tradition was to achieve a balance in the monk’s daily activity between manual labor and prayer.⁸⁵ Abba Lucius, criticizing the Euchites—who devoted themselves exclusively to unceasing prayer—seems to have found the classical solution: while performing his manual labours he recited the Psalms and considered that as prayer.⁸⁶ There is a reticence in the *Apophthegmata* regarding monks who devote their entire life to unceasing prayer while neglecting manual labour.⁸⁷ For one of the Egyptian monks, Abba Moses, there was no way to embrace Jesus without labour, humility and unceasing prayer.⁸⁸

The teachers of Gaza dealt directly with this type of prayer more than once and advised on its concrete realization. Abba Isaiah, in one of his lessons of spiritual guidance, preached love of continuous prayer (συνεχῶς προσεύχεσθαι) as the way to illuminate one’s heart.⁸⁹

⁸² *Homily* 19, ed. Dörries, p. 182. See, Also *Homily* 27.23, Dörries, p. 239, where he noted the foundation of the road to God. See also *Homily* 33; *Great Letter*. On Ps. Macarius’ teachings and writings, see C. Stewart, *Working the Earth of the Heart: The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to AD 431* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 74–116.

⁸³ Nilus, *De voluntaria paupertate* 21, PG 79, 997a. On the psychological problems stemming from unceasing prayer, see A. Guillaumont, “Le problème de la prière continuelle dans le monachisme ancien,” in idem, *Études sur la spiritualité de l’Orient Chrétien*, pp. 131–41.

⁸⁴ *Apoph.* J 714, p. 299. For this saying, see the text published by J.-C. Guy, “Un entretien monastique,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 50 (1962), pp. 235–36, 240–41, who dated it to the second half of the sixth century. On unceasing prayer in the *Apophthegmata*, see L. Regnault, “La prière continuelle ‘monologistos’ dans la littérature apophthegmatique,” *Irénikon* 47 (1974), pp. 467–93.

⁸⁵ A similar approach was advocated by Basil (*Long Rules* 37). See also Guillaumont, “Le problème de la prière continuelle dans le monachisme ancien”; Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 177–82.

⁸⁶ *Apoph.* Lucius, PG 65, 253b–c.

⁸⁷ *Apoph.* N 415, p. 139; N 440, p. 146.

⁸⁸ *Apoph.* N 500, p. 182. See also *Apoph.* N 572, p. 208.

⁸⁹ *Ascticon* 16.

Continuous prayer, according to him, was a tool by which the monk could defeat captivity (αἰχμαλωσία).⁹⁰ Following the prevalent view, the Old Men too identified demons as the major obstacle on the path leading to God, and unceasing prayer as the ultimate remedy.⁹¹ Barsanuphius recounted to Dorotheus his personal struggle with the demon of luxury and his *logismoi*, lasting five years, and that only by constant supplication did he resist and was delivered, concluding: “A continuous prayer with tears puts an end to this thing.”⁹² The perception of the devil as a powerful and authoritative entity once raised this simple enquiry by one of the monks: “Who gave to the devil its power and authority?”⁹³—a sharp and embarrassing question that was apparently anathema to Barsanuphius. According to him it was not necessary to know the answer; but praying unceasingly, he was certain, prevents all evil, because “this prayer does not leave any room in us for the devil.”⁹⁴ Hence the device of unceasing prayer is used by monks not only in order to “leave no crevice in the day or night in which the merely personal could emerge,”⁹⁵ but rather as an unceasing exercise that guarantees the elimination of evil, demons, and *logismoi*. In Barsanuphius’ view, the time of liturgy is also suitable for fighting the demons. One should cry unceasingly in spirit (κραυγάζων ἀδιαλείπτως τῷ νοῷ) in the sanctuary of the interior man: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Sabaoth, the heaven and earth are full of Your glory” (“Ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος, Κύριος Σαβαώθ, πλήρης ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης σου) (Isaiah 6:3). According to him, through the terrible, awesome sound of this cry the devil trembles and leaps out of the soul, and the demons flee in shame.⁹⁶ Certainly, the use of silent *trisagion* here is one of Barsanuphius’ most striking teachings concerning the way to put demons to flight.

Although unceasing prayer had already had a long history in monastic culture by then,⁹⁷ from the letters of Barsanuphius and

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ *Questions and Answers* 255.

⁹² Ibid., 258.

⁹³ Ibid., 127.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 848.

⁹⁵ As claimed by Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, p. 25.

⁹⁶ *Questions and Answers* 241.

⁹⁷ The classic treatment of unceasing prayer is I. Hausherr, *Hésychasme et prière*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 176 (Rome, 1966), pp. 255–306; Bunge, “Priez sans cesse”; C. Stewart, “John Cassian on Unceasing Prayer,” *Monastic Studies* 15 (1984),

John one can perceive the frequency with which the question “How can one pray unceasingly?” was asked and its acute relevance still for monks and pious laymen in sixth-century Gaza.⁹⁸ In several instances Barsanuphius approached the precept of unceasing prayer in the same spirit as is revealed in the *Apophthegmata*—that is, simply to pray in every situation and every place (1 Tim. 2:8).⁹⁹ But unceasing prayer is not merely a vague recommendation to pray; it comprises a short phrase that includes the name Jesus and it should be uttered without interruption. To Dorotheus, when he was ill, desperate, and violently attacked by luxury, Barsanuphius wrote that the devil had launched a war against him; he suggested that Dorotheus pray unceasingly, and he transmitted to him a formula of unceasing prayer: “Lord, Jesus Christ, save me from all shameful passions.”¹⁰⁰ On another occasion Barsanuphius prescribed a similar prayer for Dorotheus to recite unceasingly: “Jesus come to my help.”¹⁰¹ When one of the fathers was wondering whether it was better to adhere to the formula “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me” or to recite psalms, John took a moderate stance and advised combining the two.¹⁰² Moreover, unceasing prayer can be interpreted as inner prayer. Thus in one case John explained to a sick abbot who was unable to hold up during the liturgy that from a sick person God does not expect a corporal liturgy but rather a spiritual liturgy—that is, prayer (Ὁκ ἀπαιτεῖ ὁ θεὸς παρὰ τοῦ ἀσθενοῦντος λειτουργίαν σωματικὴν, ἀλλὰ πνευματικὴν, τοῦτ’ ἔστι τὸν εὐχὴν)—since the command is to pray without ceasing (Ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε).¹⁰³ To a layman who directly questioned the practice: “How can one pray without ceasing?” Barsanuphius explained that when one is alone he should say psalms and pray aloud and in his heart (τῷ στόματι καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ προσεύχεσθαι), but when he is in a public place or with others, he need not recite psalms aloud, only in spirit (μόνη τῇ

pp. 159–77; M. Belda, “The Concept of Continual Prayer According to John Cassian,” in *Prayer and Spirituality*, vol. II, pp. 127–43.

⁹⁸ *Questions and Answers* 710.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 441.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 175. See also Dorotheus’ instructions to Dositheus for short formulas of continual prayer during his fatal illness (*V. Dosithei* 10, SC 92, p. 138).

¹⁰³ *Questions and Answers* 212.

διανοίᾳ).¹⁰⁴ The Old Men repeatedly stressed that one should pray unceasingly—that is, without limit or stint.¹⁰⁵

Perfect Prayer

Prayer in general served in monastic culture as a promoter of spiritual progress. However, it becomes clear that only those who are perfect are worthy to recite certain prayers. For instance, Abba Isaiah has explained that the prayer “Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου) (Matt. 6:9) is appropriate only for those who are perfect (τοῦτο τῶν τελείων ἐστίν), “since there is no way that the name of God shall be sanctified by us as long as we are dominated by the passions.”¹⁰⁶ Barsanuphius and John had been asked whether it is good to meditate or to pray in the heart without words continuously? They answered that this is reserved for the perfect—those who are able to master their intellect and keep it in awe of God (Τοῦτο τῶν τελείων ἐστὶ τῶν δυναμένων κυβερνᾶν τὸν νοῦν καὶ εἰς τὸν φόβον τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχειν).¹⁰⁷ For those monks not able to guard their spirits toward God unceasingly the Old Men advised combining meditation and prayer of the tongue.¹⁰⁸

One of the important questions Barsanuphius faced in this context was the degree of perfection to which unceasing prayer belonged. Here he was very clear, answering Andrew, one of his disciples, that it belongs to the state of *apatheia*,¹⁰⁹ a state that for him was perceived also as a grace (χάρισμα) conferred by God.¹¹⁰ In his answer Barsanuphius demonstrated great familiarity with the teachings on prayer of Evagrius,¹¹¹ who insisted that “the state of prayer can be

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 710.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 241.

¹⁰⁶ Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 26; *Apophthegmata, Systematic Collection*, SC 387, p. 106.

¹⁰⁷ *Questions and Answers* 431. See also K. Ware, “Silence in Prayer: The Meaning of Hesychia,” in B. Pennington (ed.), *One Yet Two Monastic Traditions East and West*, CS 29 (Kalamazoo, 1976), p. 29. Ware noticed that for Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century everybody could undertake unceasing prayer.

¹⁰⁸ *Questions and Answers* 431.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 87.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 141.

¹¹¹ On Evagrius’ terminology and theory of prayer, see D. A. Ousley, “Evagrius’ Theology of Prayer and the Spiritual Life,” Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1979); G. Bunge, “The Spiritual Prayer: On the Trinitarian Mysticism of Evagrius of Pontus,” *Monastic Studies* 17 (1986), pp. 191–208; C. Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001), pp. 173–204.

aptly described as a habitual state of unshakable calm” (ἀπάθεια).¹¹² To the question of how one can acquire “the perfect prayer” (προσευχὴ τελεία), Barsanuphius answered in purely Evagrian terminology:

It is to converse with God without distraction and recollect all the thoughts and senses (ἔστι τὸ λαλῆσαι τῷ θεῷ ἀρεμβάστως, ἐν τῷ συνάγειν ὅλους τοὺς λογισμοὺς μετὰ τῶν αἰσθητηρίων). . . . The mind should be present before God and speak to Him. One recognizes that he is praying when one is delivered of all agitation and sees that the mind rejoices to be illuminated in the Lord (ὁ νοῦς φωτισθεὶς ἐν Κυρίῳ). And the sign that one has attained it [perfect prayer] is a state without any disturbance; even though the whole world attacks us we are not disturbed.¹¹³

Similarly, when one of the Fathers asked whether meditation (μελέτη) rendered a prayer pure (ποιεῖ καθαρὰν προσευχήν), John, following Evagrius’ teaching, clearly identified the state of pure prayer as one devoid of passions, devoid of self-will. Hence meditation, he said, is not “a prelude” (παρασκευαστική) to pure prayer (καθαρῶς προσευχῆς).¹¹⁴

From these letters we might conclude that what we have here is not simply an adoption of vague terminology, that of “pure prayer”—a term extremely rare in the days before Evagrius and clearly associated with his treatise *Chapters on Prayer*.¹¹⁵ Rather, the two Old Men were sharing the very concept of Evagrius’ prayer, perceiving it as an ascent of the mind to God, consisting in the renunciation of all things, that is the goal of spiritual progress reserved only for the perfect who practice spiritual exercises leading to the stage of *apatheia*.

¹¹² Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer* 52, PG 79, 1177, Eng. trans. Bamberger, *The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer*, p. 63. For a different view regarding Evagrius’ influence on the monastic community in Gaza, see F. Neyt, “Le vocabulaire de Barsanuphe et de Jean de Gaza,” pp. 247–53. Neyt has concluded, on the basis of the letters sent by the Old Men to Dorotheus, that the influence of the Evagrian terminology was rather minor. However, it is difficult to agree with his conclusion about the deliberate avoidance of the term *apatheia* in the correspondence. See *Correspondance*, SC 427, p. 507, note 6. The editors believe that it reflects the tendency of the Old Men to distance themselves from Evagrian terminology.

¹¹³ *Questions and Answers* 150. The last statement echoes the story told by Evagrius about a spiritual man: while he was praying a viper crawled up to him and seized his foot. He did not so much as lower his arms until he had finished his customary prayer. Evagrius, *Chapters on Prayer* 109, Eng. trans. p. 73 and note 50, where a similar passage from *Babylonian Talmud* (*Berakoth* 5, 30b) is quoted.

¹¹⁴ *Questions and Answers* 177.

¹¹⁵ On this term in early Christian literature, see S. Brock, *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian): “The Second Part,” Chapters IV–XLI*, CSCO 555 (Louvain, 1995), pp. 2–3, note 5.

Although the Old Men's vocabulary and concept of prayer linked them with the Evagrian tradition, their intellectual profile was distinctly different from that of Evagrius; they were far removed from his theology and speculative mysticism.¹¹⁶ And to follow Evagrius' teaching was not so obvious for a community that identified him as an Origenist. Nevertheless, Barsanuphius and John never actually rejected his teaching as a whole. Their followers forced them to tackle this question openly: were they permitted to read Evagrius' writings? Barsanuphius answered nervously and at length, rejecting what seemed to him "doctrines that lead to darkness" and ordering the questioning monk not to accept Evagrius' doctrines but to read what is "useful to the soul."¹¹⁷ Barsanuphius advised him not to involve himself in this problem but to walk along the path of the Fathers—that is, the path of humility, obedience, tears, asceticism, poverty, detachment of the self, etc.¹¹⁸ All this, he explained, was to be found in the sayings of the Fathers and in their *Vitae*. As Antoine Guillaumont has shown, in this matter the two Old Men's stance vis-à-vis Evagrius' writings was similar to that reflected in the *Apophthegmata patrum*.¹¹⁹ In a sense, theological controversies counted for little in the practice of shaping the self in the monastic culture. For a community that adopted the anti-intellectual ideal of Abba Isaiah it is not surprising that theology played a minor role in its spiritual direction;¹²⁰ indeed, the Old Men totally forbade the discussion of theology.¹²¹ To pursue Evagrius' monastic teaching on prayer, then, was not an obvious choice for the monks of Gaza. In the Evagrian teaching on pure prayer, however, they found what was needed for those who were perfect.

Remembrance of God

In the monastic milieu of Gaza unceasing prayer is closely connected to another sort of prayer—namely, remembrance of God (μνήμη

¹¹⁶ On this aspect of Evagrius' *Chapters on Prayer*, see I. Hausherr, "Le traité de l'Oraison d'Evagre le Pontique," *Revue d'Ascétique et de mystique* 35 (1959), pp. 1–26.

¹¹⁷ *Questions and Answers* 602–3. The anti-Origenist tenor of Barsanuphius and John is revealed in letters 600–607. See chapter 4, above.

¹¹⁸ *Questions and Answers* 600.

¹¹⁹ Guillaumont, *Les Képhalaia Gnostica*, p. 127.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 6.1, 26.18, 30.4; *Questions and Answers* 469, 698.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 694. See also chap. 4, above.

θεοῦ). Invoking the name of God unceasingly was the ultimate fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 5:17.¹²² While unceasing prayer and pure prayer served as a technique of introspection mainly for the perfect, the nature and function of remembrance of God (μνήμη θεοῦ) was different. The idea of remembrance of God was of course not born in monastic culture. The ancient writers who evoked this topic include Philo, Marcus Aurelius, Origen, and many others. Philo of Alexandria had identified that “the greatness and large number of the good and noble has for its beginning and end the perpetual recollection of God” (ἡ ὁδιόστατος περὶ θεοῦ μνήμη).¹²³ Moses, according to him, explained that one should keep the memory of God, “as an image enshrined, never to be forgotten.”¹²⁴ Alongside his biblical understanding of the remembrance of God in his description of the Therapeutae, Philo had also linked the ascetic life with the remembrance of God, recounting that they used to keep the memory of God alive even in their dreams.¹²⁵ Evoking this ideal, Marcus Aurelius advised passing from one social activity to another with the remembrance of God. He believed that remembrance of the names of gods could help keeping in mind the names of the virtues.¹²⁶

Origen in his work *On Prayer* confined himself to the simple assertion that “remembering God is profitable” and did not perceive this idea as a prayer containing precise functions.¹²⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria declared that if remembrance of God could result in the stripping off of satanic nooses, then he was ready to devote his entire thoughts to God.¹²⁸ It is more important to remember God, said

¹²² Ibid., 709.

¹²³ Philo, *The Migration of Abraham* 56, ed. F. H. Colson, LCL IV (London, 1932), p. 162. See also, *Quaestiones in Genesim et in Exodum, fragmenta graeca*, ed. and trans., F. Petit, *Les oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie* (Paris, 1978), p. 10; idem, *The Special Laws* I, 133; II, 171, ed. F. H. Colson, LCL VII (London, 1937), pp. 174, 412.

¹²⁴ Philo, *On the Virtues* 165, LCL VIII (London, 1939), p. 264.

¹²⁵ Philo, *De vita contemplativa* 26, LCL IX (London, 1941), p. 126. On this ideal in Philo, see A. Guillaumont, “Philon et les origines du monachisme,” in idem, *Aux origines du monachisme Chrétien*, pp. 25–37; H. J. Sieben, “Mnèmè Theou,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 10 (Paris, 1980), cols. 1407–14; Hausherr, *Noms du Christ et voies d’oraison*, pp. 156–62; Hadot, *Spiritual Exercises*, pp. 132–34.

¹²⁶ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* VI, 7, LCL ed. C. R. Haines (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 132; X, 8, p. 270; A. Solignac, “La mémoire et Dieu,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 10, cols. 996–99.

¹²⁷ Origen, *On Prayer* 8.2.

¹²⁸ *Expositiones in Psalmos* 27.481.18.

Gregory of Nazianzus, than to breathe; he praised the continual remembrance of God as opposed to continual discussion of theology, since discussion of theology is not for everyone.¹²⁹

In monastic culture we encounter a clear transformation of this biblical and philosophical idea into an independent pattern of prayer serving as a device for spiritual progression.¹³⁰ In the *Kephalaia Gnostica* of Diadochus of Photike, one can trace the beginnings of the transformation of *mneme theou* into the famous "Jesus prayer."¹³¹ According to him "He who wished to cleanse his heart should keep it continually aflame through practicing the remembrance of the Lord Jesus."¹³² Despite this prevalent role of the remembrance of God in purifying the soul, Diadochus linked a strikingly novel role to this idea, one deeply rooted in his mystical approach. For him, contemplative concentration of the mind on the remembrance of God constitutes the intellect's mechanism for regaining its original tenacity. The remembrance of God virtually blocks all the mind's outlets, hence the intellect requires of us imperatively some task that will satisfy its need for activity. For the complete fulfillment of its purpose we should give it nothing but the prayer "Lord Jesus."¹³³ The Jesus prayer, then, is for Diadochus nourishment for the mind that will bring it to harmony and calm. He concluded that those who meditate unceasingly upon this glorious and holy name in the depths of their heart can sometimes achieve the Evagrian ideal of seeing the light of their own intellect.

The monks of Gaza cultivated a particular form of memory of God, a type of prayer that served as a *techniques du soi* in the words of Michel Foucault—that is, practices for the formation of a certain sort of self. In his discussion on perfection Abba Isaiah spells out various components of perfection, stressing the necessity of remembrance of God for unceasingly stimulating someone on the road toward perfection.¹³⁴ For above all it is a tool for calming the *logis-*

¹²⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 27,3–4, Eng. trans., F. Norris, L. Wickham, and F. Williams, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* XIII (Leiden, 1991), pp. 218–19.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Cassian, *Conferences* 10.10, SC 54, p. 85; K. Ware, "The Holy Name of Jesus in East and West: The Hesychasts and Richard Rolle," *Sobornost* 4 (1982), p. 167.

¹³¹ Ware, "The Holy Name of Jesus."

¹³² Diadochus, *Hundred Gnostic Chapters* 97, SC 5bis, p. 159.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 59, 119.

¹³⁴ Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 23.3.

moi and various passions and temptations.¹³⁵ Barsanuphius too assigned a central place to invoking the name of God, and he perceived it as a prayer *par excellence*.¹³⁶ Remembrance of God, tranquillity of the spirit, and humility are the dispositions appropriate for banishing all evil thoughts.¹³⁷ In several cases he considered it beyond the ability of the monk to vanquish passions; but through invocation of the name of God the devices (μηχανήματα) of the enemies are reduced to nothing.¹³⁸ According to circumstance the invocation of God's name could be uttered aloud or in the heart, on the basis of Matthew 6:6, "Pray to your Father in secret, with the door shut."¹³⁹ When it is not possible to invoke Him even in the heart, then it is sufficient just to remember God in order to be safe, since in Barsanuphius' eyes remembrance is more rapid than invocation.¹⁴⁰ Barsanuphius and John by no means encouraged excessive habits of prayer. To a layman who wanted to know how many times one should invoke the name of God the Old Man wrote that it is preferable only once and in any case no more than three times.¹⁴¹ Dorotheus asked if it was possible to banish his passionate thoughts by refutation or rejection. Barsanuphius replied that opposition and rebuke are only for people strong enough to struggle successfully with the demons; others can only seek "refuge in the name of Jesus," since for all passions, nothing is more efficacious than invoking the name of God.¹⁴² So he advised him to recite without ceasing, "Lord Jesus Christ save me from shameful passions," or simply, "Jesus, come to my aid."¹⁴³

From the correspondence we can glean the development of the tradition of remembrance of God. Dorotheus himself first consulted Barsanuphius as to whether he was worthy of practicing remembrance of God continuously, then he asked for instructions. Barsanuphius

¹³⁵ *Questions and Answers* 661.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 425.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 454.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹³⁹ Barsanuphius inherited the exegetical tradition that identified the "inner chamber" (Matt. 6:6) with the heart and silent prayer. For this tradition in Syriac literature, see Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer*, pp. 3, 14, 34, 170, 236–37.

¹⁴⁰ *Questions and Answers* 430.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 479.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 304. See also *ibid.*, 474, 563, 565.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 255, 268. See also, F. Neyt, "The Prayer of Jesus," *Sobornost* 6 (1974), pp. 641–54, esp. p. 649.

encouraged him to begin this practice and not to fear it.¹⁴⁴ Distracted by his work treating his fellow monks in the monastery's infirmary, Dorotheus almost failed to remember God, and this troubled him. Could one remember God while working and in the presence of other people? Barsanuphius assured him that each person can practice continuous remembrance of God according to his own measure.¹⁴⁵ Dorotheus in turn recommended remembrance of God, saying that it accompanies the monk in all his activities¹⁴⁶ and comforts the soul (ἡ μνήμη τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλεῖ τὴν ψυχὴν), using as a textual basis Psalms 77:4.¹⁴⁷ The "Jesus prayer" is not discussed in Dorotheus' *Instructions*, nor is the theoretical aspect of prayer in general.¹⁴⁸ His main role was to transmit to his monks, and mainly to his disciple Dositheus, the instructions and formulas of prayer he had received from Barsanuphius and John,¹⁴⁹ such as to pray unceasingly "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me" and "Son of God, save me."¹⁵⁰ During Dositheus' illness his master urged that he not forget his prayer. But when he was moribund and no longer able to pray, Dorotheus instructed him to reduce his prayer and "simply remember God."¹⁵¹ This instruction apparently stems from Barsanuphius' clear conviction that remembrance of God is the core of piety.¹⁵²

It is typical of Barsanuphius and John that their main concern was to provide their clients with immediate solutions to their problems and temptations, rather than searching out the causes of those problems. Thus when the monk John of Beersheba proposed "seeking out the causes of the temptations that rose up against him in diverse ways," the Old Man advised him: "Labour not in searching out matters, but call out the name of Jesus, saying: 'Jesus, help me'"

¹⁴⁴ *Questions and Answers* 266.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 328, 329.

¹⁴⁶ Dorotheus, *Letter* 12, SC 92, p. 520.

¹⁴⁷ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 12, p. 384.

¹⁴⁸ For a brief discussion on the necessity of continuous prayer in Dorotheus' teaching, see *Instructions* 2, pp. 202–3.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, *Letter* 2, p. 500, where a short prayer is given for combating troubles that persist.

¹⁵⁰ *V. Dositheï* 10, p. 138. On this prayer in Dorotheus' teachings, see Hausherr, *Noms du Christ et voies d'oraison*, pp. 237–39.

¹⁵¹ *V. Dositheï* 10, p. 138.

¹⁵² *Questions and Answers* 430.

(κράζε τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ, λέγων· Ἰησοῦ βοήθει μοι).¹⁵³ Barsanuphius honestly admitted that he did not know how the remedy of invoking God's name functions, nor how it annihilates passions. However, he was unequivocal that "the fact of invoking God unceasingly is a remedy that not only avoids all the passions but also eradicates the act itself;"¹⁵⁴ the Old Men were certain that the *mneme theou* "utterly destroys all that is evil."¹⁵⁵ This concept of remedy is quite far removed from Basil of Caesarea's understanding of the noetic role of *mneme theou*¹⁵⁶ and relative unimportance of the name Jesus in Evagrius' thought;¹⁵⁷ it is also distant from Diadochus' concept of reunification of the soul by perpetual *mneme theou*.¹⁵⁸ This conclusion fits with the general inclination in the monastic community of Gaza to belittle the speculative and mystical approach. François Neyt has proposed that the rise of the "Jesus prayer" in Gaza is linked to the anthropology of the Gazan school, centered on the idea of the heart, reflecting a simple and pragmatic conception of life; Evagrius' school in contrast clearly distinguished between body, soul, and mind.¹⁵⁹ Neyt's schema is attractive, yet it tends to oversimplify the Gazan anthropology and to distinguish Evagrian spirituality too sharply from that of Gaza. Dorotheus himself, well versed in Evagrius' teaching, was looking for a clear and simple formula of prayer.¹⁶⁰ So sharp a

¹⁵³ Ibid., 39.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 424, 565; *ibid.*, 709, where he made the claim that unceasing invocation of the name of God diminishes the passions.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 692. On the power of the divine name, see K. Ware, *The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 1–32; *idem*, "The Holy Name of Jesus," pp. 163–84.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Basil, *Letter* 2. 2, 4; *Short Rules* 157, with J. E. Bamberger, "MNHMH-ΔΙΑΘΕΣΙΣ: The Psychic Dynamisms in the Ascetical Theology of St. Basil," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 34 (1968), pp. 233–51; J. Gribomont, *Saint Basile: Évangile et église*, 2, *Spiritualité orientale* 37 (Bégrolles-en Mauges, 1984), pp. 426–42; Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, pp. 80, 225–26; G. Filoramo, "Mneme Teou e preghiera continua in Basilio," *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 66 (1998), pp. 179–87.

¹⁵⁷ See Ware, "The Holy Name of Jesus," p. 167.

¹⁵⁸ On the role of remembrance of God in Diadochus' teachings, see Diadochus, *Hundred Gnostic Chapters* 59–61, 70, 97, SC 5bis, pp. 119–21, 130, 159; D. Hester, "Diadochos of Photiki: The Memory and Its Purification," *Studia Patristica* 23 (1989), pp. 49–52.

¹⁵⁹ Neyt, "The Prayer of Jesus," p. 644; *idem*, "Le vocabulaire de Barsanuphe et de Jean de Gaza."

¹⁶⁰ On the degree of Evagrius' influence on Dorotheus, see L. Regnault and J. de Préville, *Dorothee de Gaza: Oeuvres spirituelles*, pp. 76–77. For a more careful conclusion, see P. Canivet, "Dorothee de Gaza: Est-il un disciple d'Evagre?"

dichotomy between two currents of spirituality—one centered on the mind, the other on the heart—is somewhat misleading; in the case of the community of Gaza, as we saw earlier, the mind had a central role in the Old Men’s concept of perfect prayer.

Two approaches can be identified in the letters of Barsanuphius and John for helping a monk construct a new self through the mechanism of prayer. First was their fidelity to Evagrius’ teaching on pure prayer, which was highly intellectual and reserved only for the perfect. But at the same time they also embraced, for the simple monks, the less demanding technique of the “Jesus prayer” and remembrance of God, since simple and unsophisticated methods were needed as a therapy for passions in everyday life. Discussions on pure and spiritual prayer in monastic culture in subsequent generations in the East, mainly in Syriac literature, attest to the difficulty the spiritual fathers experienced in offering it to all their flock as a tool of salvation.¹⁶¹ Adopting the “Jesus prayer” and developing various formulas illustrates the distinctively practical nature of spiritual exercises in the community of Gaza. It should be noted that although the teachers of Gaza adopted Evagrius’ technique of pure prayer, there is no trace in the corpus of the concept and practice of contemplation (θεωρία), which was an integral component of Evagrius’ spiritual progress. That aspect of Evagrius’ teaching was entirely ignored. Nevertheless, on one of the rare occasions when Barsanuphius described the culmination of perfection as the total self-transformation of a monk to a state of *theosis*, he declared: “In this state there is no agitation nor distractions, while becoming entirely mind, entirely eye, entirely alive, entirely light, entirely perfect, entirely God.”¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ See, for example, *Isaac of Nineveh* 22, Eng. trans. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer*, pp. 252–63.

¹⁶² *Questions and Answers* 207.

CHAPTER NINE

DAILY LIFE

The “library” of the monastic communities of Gaza was likely to include a major portion of the classics as well as the “best-sellers” of the monastic literature of the age, such as the Pachomian writings, Basil’s ascetic works, certain works of Evagrius, and the *apophthegmata*. Yet the general picture of these communities that emerges from their writings does not conform to any specific and coherent monastic tradition. At times the leaders’ attitude seems quite flexible and moderate, at other times strict and rigorous; they are often responsive to the particular circumstances of the monks, yet are uncompromising, even obdurate regarding certain issues. As was the case with spiritual exercises in this circle, where no particular “spiritual code” (*nomos pneumatikos*) was followed, so it was with various aspects of practical life: no monastic rule or a detailed set of regulations has survived from this monastic centre. The practical aspects of life seem nowhere to have been systematically laid down. Shorter or longer treatments of a variety of topics pertaining to the daily ascetic reality of the monks and the monasteries are however dispersed throughout the literary corpus of Gaza monasticism, especially in the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah and the *Questions and Answers* of Barsanuphius and John.

One of the concerns persistently preoccupying the monk was the issue of food. The consumption of food in a monastery is not a trivial matter. It relates to spiritual values, institutional structure, and social roles, and it involves anxiety, tension, conflict, and ambiguity. Since various degrees of abstinence from food and fasting are a central component of the ascetic imperative, its significance in a monastic setting is greatly magnified. Such questions as the appropriate quantities of food and beverages to consume as well as specific regulations for conduct at the communal table were regularly debated. Abba Isaiah recommended eating one meal a day. The golden rule was to stop eating while still hungry.¹ The quantity of wine

¹ *Asceticon* 4.

recommended by Abba Isaiah was up to three glasses daily.² The inclusion of wine in the regular ascetic diet seems to represent a departure from the common practice at Nitria and at the Pachomian monasteries. Evagrius, Basil, and Shenoute advised against the regular drinking of wine, recommending it only for the sick.³ The *Rules of Rabbula* strictly prohibit wine drinking,⁴ whereas the so-called *Canons of Maruta* permit wine drinking only on holidays.⁵ In the Judean Desert monasteries, however, wine seems to have been readily available and abstinence from wine was regarded as a mark of extreme asceticism.⁶

Abba Isaiah further advised that eating should be a private and secret act (λάθρα) for the anchoretic monk.⁷ His guiding rule regarding the daily quantity of food was adopted by Barsanuphius and John. The general emphasis was on moderation, avoiding extremes;⁸ consumption should cease short of satiety, one should always remain a little hungry and thirsty.⁹ But it was acknowledged that the proper amount of food differs from one person to another and can only be learned from personal experience.¹⁰ It should be adjusted to the individual, even if that meant eating three times a day,¹¹ and a special eating regimen should be set for the sick.¹² Nevertheless, if the body

² *Asceticon* 4, 9.4.

³ See Evagrius, *Ad virginem* 10, ed. H. Gressmann, TU 39 (Berlin, 1919), pp. 146–151; *Ad Monachos* 38–39; Basil, *An Ascetical Discourse* 4, PG 31, col. 877A; Pachomian Koinonia II, *Precepts* 54, Eng. trans. by A. Veilleux (Kalamazoo, 1981), p. 155; Pachomian Koinonia III, *The Instructions of Saint Pachomius* 1, 46, p. 35; Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, pp. 19, 23.

⁴ *The Rules of Rabbula for the Monks* 4, in A. Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm, 1960), p. 27.

⁵ *Canons of Maruta* 54, 25, in Vööbus, *ibid.*, p. 143.

⁶ See Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, p. 88.

⁷ *Asceticon* 8.65.

⁸ Cassian also generally recommended a moderate diet against the dangers of overly strict asceticism. See C. Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 73.

⁹ *Questions and Answers* 154–155, 158; Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 4.44.

¹⁰ *Questions and Answers* 154.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 503.

¹² *Ibid.*, 151. A generally moderate and flexible regimen regarding the quantity of food ingested, the time for meals, and the manner of eating was advocated by Basil, who even stated that it was impossible to set universal rules on these matters (*Long Rules* 19). A relatively flexible regimen was also advocated in Shenoute's monasteries. See B. Layton, "Social Structure and Food Consumption in an Early Christian Monastery: The Evidence of Shenoute's *Canons* and the White Monastery Federation A.D. 385–465," *Le Muséon* 115 (2002), pp. 25–54, esp. pp. 45–47.

weakens under regular dietary conditions, it is a sign that the weakness derives from demons.¹³ According to Barsanuphius and John the difference between summer and winter should be taken into account in prescribing the appropriate quantities of food and drink.¹⁴ Though they may seem to have been moderate and even liberal in setting their general guidelines, when it came to actual quantities of daily food and drink Barsanuphius and John were in fact stricter than Abba Isaiah; Barsanuphius recommended one glass of wine and one plate of food—that is, one meal per day,¹⁵ whereas John defined the optimal quantity of drink as half a cup per day, preferably drunk all at once, though this should be increased in the event of an attack of thoughts.¹⁶

The monastic sources of the Gaza region supply only scant and random information regarding the content of the ascetic diet. Although Jerome provided a detailed account of the development of Hilarion's dietary regimen, his account is hardly credible.¹⁷ Rather, it reflects various contemporary monastic diets known to Jerome and grafted onto Hilarion's biography. It seems, however, that as in the contemporary Judean Desert monasteries, the main source of calories in Seridus' monastery was bread.¹⁸ The *Life of Dositheus* includes a fascinating account of Dositheus' ascetic apprenticeship to Dorotheus and the gradual reduction of his daily consumption of bread from 6 pounds to 8 ounces (= 218 gr.).¹⁹ In addition to bread we read occasionally of fish, soup, olives, figs, dates, onions, and fruits and vegetables in general, of which some must have been the produce of the monastery's garden.²⁰ Thus we may assume that various fruits and vegetables also formed part of the monastic diet in the region.²¹

¹³ *Questions and Answers* 154.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁷ *V. Hilar.* 11.

¹⁸ On bread as the staple of the monk's diet in the Judean Desert, see Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 82–85.

¹⁹ *V. Dosithei* 5, SC 92, pp. 128–130. This quantity seems considerably less than the two dried loaves recommended by Cassian. See Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 72. For bread as the major component of the ascetic diet, see also Dorotheus, *Instructions*, 3.

²⁰ On the garden of Seridus' monastery, see Dorotheus, *Instructions* 9.

²¹ See e.g. *V. Petr. Ib.* 101–103; *Questions and Answers* 126; Dorotheus, *Instructions* 3 and 11; *V. Dosithei* 11, p. 140. A similar diet was advocated in Pachomian monas-

Animal products such as eggs and cheese seem not to have been regularly available, despite the rural character of this monasticism,²² apart from the varying availability of vegetables or fruit, depending on the region, the diet of the monks in the Gaza region was not essentially different from that of the Judean Desert monks.²³

Barsanuphius and John claimed that meditation, suppressing the appetite, offers a means of coping with the difficulty of maintaining a strict dietary regime. Suppression of appetite through meditation was regarded by them as a means of acquiring spiritual food that deflects the conscious need for material food.²⁴

The importance of the daily communal meal, attested already in Pachomian monasticism, is reflected in Abba Isaiah's specific instructions, strictly regulating the monks' behaviour at table. It is further evidenced in the monks' questions to Barsanuphius and John concerning conduct during these meals.²⁵ Here too, the legacy of Abba Isaiah as recorded in the *Asceticon* was studied and revered in the monastery of Abba Seridus. The regular hour for the daily meal in Abba Seridus' monastery, and probably also in that of Abba Isaiah, was the ninth hour of the day (3 p.m.).²⁶ According to the *Asceticon*,

teries and in those of Shenoute: see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, pp. 85–86; Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, p. 19. This diet, however, differs from that of Evagrius, who was noted by Palladius for his renunciation of fresh fruits and vegetables (*Historia Lausiaca* 38). Evagrius recommended dry foods (*Praktikos* 91), and claimed thirst was a remedy for lust (*ibid.*, 17). This dietary stance was followed by Cassian, who emphasized dried and uncooked food, claiming his diet to be founded on medical principles: minimal diet reduces sexual arousal and nocturnal emissions. See Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 72.

²² See *V. Dosithei* 8, pp. 134–136.

²³ For the diet of Judean Desert monks in general, see Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 82–91.

²⁴ *Questions and Answers* 152. For the possible physiological and metabolic effects of meditation, see B. Sears, *The Anti-Aging Zone* (New York, 1999), pp. 106–112.

²⁵ For table conduct in general, see also Basil, *On the Renunciation of the World and Spiritual Perfection* 8, PG 31, col. 644B–C; *Long Rules* 21.

²⁶ *Questions and Answers* 522. This seems to have been a common hour in the coenobia. But in Pachomian monasteries it was common to have two meals a day. See *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. II, p. 184, n. 13; Rousseau, *Pachomius*, p. 84. The so-called *Canons of Maruta*, 54,18, refer to two meals in monasteries of workers, at the sixth hour and in the evening, whereas monks who did not work were to have one meal, at the ninth hour or in the evening. This may have been the custom also in some of the Judean Desert monasteries: see Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*, p. 89.

silence must be maintained around the table during the meal.²⁷ In *Asceticon* 3 Abba Isaiah presented a code of *politesse* at the table: to guard against unruly behaviour, the young monk should restrain his desire to begin eating and should first remember his sins. During the meal he is allowed to hold out his hand for something only to the person sitting across from him.²⁸ The monk must not raise his head during the meal, must avoid looking at others eating,²⁹ and when holding out his hand for something, must address his brother as “blessed.”³⁰ He should also be wary of drinking water noisily and of clearing his throat during the meal. While seated at the table the monk must take care that his monastic habit covers his legs and that his legs are pressed together.³¹

The correspondence of Barsanuphius and John evidences a horror among the monks enjoying their food or being assailed by a passion for food during the meal.³² Because the temptation posed by food is especially strong during a meal, certain monks tended to finish their meal quickly, before the rest in order to avoid further temptation by leaving the table, although this required the permission of the abbot. This quasi-military practice, however, tended to invoke criticism from the other monks, who were offended by such behaviour. But John advised that to remain with others without eating further, was possible only for those who were perfect, and he rebuked the complaining monks.³³ Dorotheus asked whether it was permissible to take his portion of food even if he had no need of it—in order not to seem to be rejecting it—and later give it to the patients in the clinic.³⁴ John offered a series of recommendations for

²⁷ *Asceticon* 1. See also *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. II, *Precepts* 31, p. 150; Basil, *On Ascetical Discipline* 1, PG 31, col. 648D; *The Rules Attributed to Rabbula* 25, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, p. 84.

²⁸ *Asceticon* 3. The Pachomian *Precepts* demand only that in the presence of the housemaster, he should not stretch out his hand at the table: see *Precepts* 30, p. 150.

²⁹ *Asceticon* 3.

³⁰ See *Precepts* 33, p. 150, allowing only for signaling when necessary.

³¹ *Asceticon* 3. See also *Precepts* 2, p. 145. Basil, too, advised against sitting with the legs crossed. According to him, it signified a distracted mind (*On the Renunciation of the World and Spiritual Perfection* 8, PG 31, col. 644A).

³² *Questions and Answers* 126; 162. See also Dorotheus, *Instructions* 15.

³³ *Questions and Answers* 545–546. This stance differs somewhat from Basil’s description of the monk’s natural inclination to remain at the table until he is not hungry any more (*On the Renunciation of the World and Spiritual Perfection* 8, PG 31, col. 644C).

³⁴ *Questions and Answers* 323.

the control of gluttony at the communal meal,³⁵ based on the instructions of Abba Isaiah, indicating that a warning sign of gluttony is the desire to eat before the set time.³⁶ He also recommended meditation as an antidote when the craving for food attacked during the meal. If the craving dominated to the point where the monk could not eat in moderation, he should abstain from eating if he was by himself at the table; if with others, he should eat a little so as not to attract notice.³⁷ If he was hungry, he should eat some bread or other food that did not require him to struggle with his desire to eat.³⁸ Dorotheus reported the case of a monk who could not overcome his passion for food and, being embarrassed to ask for more, resorted to stealing.³⁹ The habitual monastic fasts represented a further difficulty, in particular the constant temptation to break the fast before the set time, and actually breaking the fast ahead of the other brothers.⁴⁰

Moderation seems to characterize also the monastic attitude toward sleep prevalent in Egyptian monastic practice. Whereas Abba Isaiah generally expressed the accepted ascetic ethos that a surplus of sleep, arouses the passions,⁴¹ John specifically recommended six hours of night sleep beginning two hours after sunset.⁴² This seems to correspond to the Egyptian practice. Cassian, however, recommended between three and four hours of sleep.⁴³ Barsanuphius claimed that

³⁵ According to Basil, gluttony was the essence of Adam's sin (*On the Renunciation of the World and Spiritual Perfection* 7, PG 31, col. 640C). See also Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 220.

³⁶ *Questions and Answers* 163; Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 3.11.

³⁷ Shenoute, however, required fasting monks to be present at the communal meal. See Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, p. 19.

³⁸ *Questions and Answers* 162.

³⁹ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 11. For the common stealing of food in Shenoute's monasteries, including the bread for the Eucharist, see Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, pp. 23, 36, 43; Layton, "Social Structure and Food Consumption," p. 49. On stealing in general in monasteries, see *The Rules Attributed to Rabbula* 9, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, p. 81; *The So-called Canons of Maruta*, 54, 14, in Vööbus, *ibid.*, p. 140; John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow* 211, PG 83/3, 3101–3104.

⁴⁰ *Questions and Answers* 250; Dorotheus, *Instructions* 15.

⁴¹ *Asceticon* 16.59.

⁴² *Questions and Answers* 146.

⁴³ See Cassian, *Conference* 12.15.2, 13.6.2; A. Rousselle, "Abstinence et continence dans les monastères de Gaule méridionale à la fin de l'antiquité et au début du Moyen Âge: étude d'un régime alimentaire et de sa fonction," in *Hommage à André Dupont* (1897–1972). *Études médiévales languedociennes* (Montpellier, 1974), pp. 239–254; C. Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 72.

half a night is the appropriate amount of sleep according to the Fathers; but he nevertheless allowed for individual adjustments regarding sleep, similar to his relative flexibility regarding food; the degree of fatigue and weakness of each monk should be the criterion for the length measure of sleep.⁴⁴ John further suggested calculating the hours of the day and night according to portions of Psalms, dividing the hours of the night according to portions that can be recited in one night, with different calculations for winter and summer.⁴⁵ As was the practice in some of the Judean Desert monasteries, the monks in Abba Isaiah's and Seridus' monasteries normally slept on a mat and rested their heads on a pillow.⁴⁶ Regarding the position of the body during sleep, Abba Isaiah specifically instructed that the monk, when prone, should not put his hands under his garment, apparently as a precaution against masturbation. The Pachomian *Precepts* allude to such a precaution, warning that no one should oil his hands in the evening unless a brother is sent to accompany him, while Cassian explicitly admonished the monks against masturbation. Similarly, the so-called *Canons of Maruta* state that a monk should sleep fully dressed and not loosen his girdle.⁴⁷ There is no mention of such extreme ascetic practices such as sitting, standing, or lying in awkward, uncomfortable positions.

As with food and sleep, the regulations regarding clothing in the monastery of Seridus seem not to have been very strict. Our sources do not mention any common supply store for clothes, nor that the clothes of the monks were considered to be common property of the monastery, as was recommended by Basil;⁴⁸ apparently clothes were regarded as the personal property of the monk. John recommended two sets of clothes for the weaker monks—one for summer and another for winter—but only one set of garments for the stronger monks. Two sets of clothes, were recommended also in Syrian monastic regulations; it clearly differs, however, from Basil's instruction to

⁴⁴ *Questions and Answers* 158.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁴⁶ *Asceticon* 9; *Questions and Answers* 327; For evidence from the Judean Desert, see Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 93–94.

⁴⁷ *Asceticon* 3.69; *Pachomian Koinonia, Precepts* 92, p. 161; Cassian, *Conferences* 20.9.5; Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 67; *Canons of Maruta* 54, 19, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, p. 141.

⁴⁸ Basil, *An Ascetical Discourse* 5, PG 31, col. 877D.

have only one garment.⁴⁹ Two sets of clothes may have been the general standard in Gaza. But from Dorotheus' questions to John upon his being admitted to the monastery, we get an unusual inventory of the possible wardrobe of a monk in the coenobium. Dorotheus was embarrassed by his relatively rich array of clothes and asked which of them he should keep for himself and which give to the monastery. The basic wardrobe that John advised him to keep does not give the impression of being especially minimalist: two thick tunics (κολόβια στερεά) and one shirt (λεβητωνάριον) for the winter; two light tunics (κολόβια ἐλαφρά) and one shirt for the summer; one mantle (θωράκον) for severely cold weather; a cowl (κουκούλιον); a winter and a summer coat (μανδύα); and two covers (σκεπάσματα), one heavy, the other light. In the event that Dorotheus were to receive a new garment, he should give the old one to the abbot.⁵⁰ Later, however, as abbot of his own monastery, Dorotheus listed the following items as constituting the basic set of clothes for the monk in his monastery: a tunic with short sleeves, a leather belt, a scapular (ἀνάλαβος), and a cowl. The tunic should bear a purple mark, signifying their fight for Christ, their king.⁵¹ This short list roughly resembles the basic wardrobe of a Judean Desert monk.⁵²

Medical issues were another daily concern preoccupying the leaders of the monastic community and demanding an ideological stance.⁵³ Barsanuphius and John's general approach seems to reflect the basic attitudes prevalent in earlier and contemporary monastic literature.⁵⁴ A distinction was drawn between natural and demonic diseases,⁵⁵ the latter being caused by moral flaws. Illness was therefore also a means

⁴⁹ *Questions and Answers* 146; *Canons of Maruta*, p. 142, no. 22; Basil, *Long Rules* 22–23.

⁵⁰ *Questions and Answers* 326.

⁵¹ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 1.

⁵² See Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 91–93.

⁵³ For another example of the central place of medical issues in the later monastic *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius of Sinai, see Dagron, “Le saint, le savant, l’astrologue,” p. 144.

⁵⁴ For a general survey of monastic attitudes to sickness and medicine in this period, see P. Horden, “The Death of Ascetics: Sickness and Monasticism in the Early Byzantine Middle East,” in W. J. Sheils (ed.), *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, *Studies in Church History* 22 (Oxford, 1985), pp. 41–52. For patristic attitudes toward medicine, see M. Dörnemann, *Krankheit und Heilung in der Theologie der frühen Kirchenwäter* (Tübingen, 2003), esp. pp. 288–298.

⁵⁵ On this distinction, cf. Horden, “The Death of Ascetics,” p. 51.

of moral correction or punishment employed by God and beneficial for the soul.⁵⁶ Barsanuphius claimed that the reason a certain layman had suffered the return of a fever was because he had talked immoderately about the healing powers of Barsanuphius.⁵⁷ Thus the cure for an illness depended ultimately on strict morality and faith, and was in the hands of God.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, in practice they seem to have espoused a more realistic, if not quite liberal, stance. The criterion for distinguishing between natural and demonic diseases was whether the body weakened under regular dietary conditions, this being a sign that the weakness was caused by demons.⁵⁹ Recovery was therefore dependent on the faith of the sick man; he participated in his own healing.⁶⁰ One might use medications, but it was through the power of God that physicians healed. Hence turning to a doctor was not sinful, but there was an advantage in avoiding doing so and looking instead to God for healing.⁶¹ Those who avoided medication when sick achieved the supreme degree of faith, though not yet of perfection.⁶² Those who were perfect entrusted everything to God, the rest consulted a doctor.⁶³ Barsanuphius in fact stated that going to a doctor indicated a lack of faith. He claimed that he himself had never gone to a doctor nor used medicine. But he somewhat qualified his statement by explaining that this was due to his refusal to approach a city or a fort, be under the authority of another,

⁵⁶ *Questions and Answers* 59, 189, 521. For a similar concept of diseases, see Basil, *Long Rules* 55. On the body as an index of sin and morality and on diseases as a test and a means for the renewal of self-discipline, see Horden, "The Death of Ascetics," pp. 44–45, 50.

⁵⁷ *Questions and Answers* 643.

⁵⁸ See Horden, "The Death of Ascetics," p. 44.

⁵⁹ *Questions and Answers* 154. According to Basil a prolonged disease is a sign of sinfulness: see Basil, *Long Rules* 55.

⁶⁰ *Questions and Answers* 387.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 225, 508. Basil likewise stated that the art of medicine was a gift from God, but he asserted that rejecting the benefits of medicine was the sign of a petty nature (Basil, *Long Rules* 55). According to him, only when the disease was recognized to be punitive should one not resort to medicine (*ibid.*). For evidence of a similar approach in the *Apophthegmata*, the even more positive attitudes of Theodoret, and further evidence of positive attitude to medicine in monasteries, see Horden, "The Death of Ascetics," pp. 47–48.

⁶² *Questions and Answers* 529.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 770. According to more extreme views, a monk should categorically refuse the treatment of a doctor. Not only was there no need for medical treatment but it even caused, spiritual damage. Medical treatment could become addictive and a cause for vainglory. See Horden, "The Death of Ascetics," pp. 42–44.

or be a burden.⁶⁴ In practice, however, not only medications and doctors were permitted but also remedial surgery, though permission was required from one of the fathers, hoping that he may be able to cure the sick himself.⁶⁵

The semi-liberal attitude of the Old Men to medical issues is evident in the recognition that the change in weather conditions around Easter weakened the body—though the fathers, being perfect, were immune to this effect⁶⁶—and in the adjustment of the ascetic diet to the changing seasons. This attitude is clearly manifested in their initiative to open a clinic in the monastery and their permission to Dorotheus to use medical books in discharging his duty as manager of the clinic. They saw no contradiction between piety and the science of medicine.⁶⁷ Under Dorotheus and with the encouragement of the Old Men and Abbot Seridus, the clinic became an established feature of the monastery, where local monks as well as outside patients were treated.

Bathing was also considered at the time to be medically beneficial, while nevertheless regarded by ascetic morality as a cause of moral laxity and debility. Barsanuphius and John's attitude to bathing can be gauged only from their correspondence with laymen. It is impossible to tell, though, whether the monks of the monastery ever bathed. Ascetic morality regarding bathing permeated also lay circles. When the doctor instructed a sick layman to bathe and the patient expressed the fear that to do so would be a sin, John assured him that bathing was not forbidden to laymen when needed.⁶⁸ Another layman hesitated to bathe because he was regarded by others as a devout person, and he feared that in doing so he would offend those who believed that he had been avoiding the bath because of his piety. John's answer here was similar: Bathing only for the purposes of self-indulgence was a sin.⁶⁹ All of which establishes that, in principle, bathing, though considered detrimental to ascetic morality or even a sin, was permissible—at least for laymen—for therapeutic purposes. John's statements concerning bathing may imply that it

⁶⁴ *Questions and Answers* 532.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 534.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 770.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 771.

was forbidden to the monks of the monastery. Nevertheless, baths were found in the monastery of Martyrius in the Judean Desert as well as in a recently excavated monastery at Deir al-Nuseirat south of Gaza that might be identified with Seridus' monastery. But it is not clear to what stage in the history of these monastic complexes the baths belong and whether they served the monastic community at large or only guests and sick people.⁷⁰ Finally, it seems worth mentioning that Barsanuphius and John objected to the use of charms in medicine, even for the treatment of sick animals. Instead John recommended veterinary medicine and holy water.⁷¹

The series of questions and answers exchanged between Dorotheus and the Old Men includes some dealing with the problem of attraction and attachment to material objects of a trivial nature as an ongoing obstacle to achieving ascetic perfection. Dorotheus inquired regarding his attraction to a certain object, even though it was an item of necessity;⁷² and he further feared that he had acquired a certain garment not out of need but from a desire to accumulate. In response John formulated something of a general principle: the criterion is whether the acquisition of the required object is accompanied by an ardent desire for this object.⁷³ The legacy of the need to fight any sign of attachment or attraction to a material object is gracefully elaborated in the *Life of Dositheus*. During Dositheus' apprenticeship as a monk in the clinic, Dorotheus coached him on how to become detached from material objects—such as a particular knife that attracted him or certain used clothes that Dorotheus gave him to mend.⁷⁴ These anecdotes afford us an unusual glance at initiatory practices in Seridus' monastery.

The renunciation of wealth (ἀποταγή) upon joining a monastery was a delicate matter. On his admittance to the monastery, Dorotheus asked the Old Men whether he should distribute his wealth to the

⁷⁰ Y. Magen and R. Talgam, "The Monastery of Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim (Khirbet el-Murassas) and its Mosaics," in G. C. Bottini, L. Disegni, E. Alliata (eds.), *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land: New Discoveries. Essays in Honour of Virgilio C. Corbo* (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 106. The bath at the monastery at Deir al-Nuseirat was excavated by Yasser Khassouna, and a report of the excavation has not yet been published. Another monastery bath was recently discovered in the vast monastic complex of Kursi on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

⁷¹ *Questions and Answers* 753.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 336.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁷⁴ *V. Dosithei* 7–8, pp. 132–136.

monastery and to the poor through the abbot. John replied that Dorotheus' wealth was negligent compared to that of those who had given their money to Abba Isaiah, and that he should dispose of it at his discretion, the principle being that the beneficiary should not be grateful toward the benefactor.⁷⁵ Barsanuphius allowed a certain amount of latitude, suggesting that Dorotheus define the portions he wished to give to the monastery and to the poor, respectively; yet he regarded Dorotheus' indecisiveness as a sign of weakness, indicating the ongoing existence of self-will.⁷⁶ Dorotheus did not yet have the strength to give up all his possessions and had retained a small estate for his own economic security. Barsanuphius, showing himself to be a sensitive guide, advised Dorotheus to keep it for a while until he became stronger.⁷⁷ When Dorotheus further inquired whether he should give presents directly to the monks of the monastery or through the abbot, John told him that it would indeed be preferable to distribute the presents through the abbot, apparently considering self-distribution as a possible cause for vainglory and entailing a certain indebtedness to the benefactor. It is worth noting that this stance was in contrast to Basil's general recommendation that if possible a monk should distribute his property personally, taking full responsibility for his act.⁷⁸ Dorotheus also wished to donate all his books and clothes to the monastery. But he was advised to keep some of them, together with his mat and pillow. Should he in the future receive a new garment, he should give the old one to the abbot.⁷⁹

It is remarkable that an ascetic society regulating the minute details of material renunciation would allow monks to own individual cells for seclusion outside the coenobium. More striking yet is what we learn from Abba Isaiah, that certain monks, though apparently not those in his own monastery, possessed slaves, prompting him to advise them against it.⁸⁰ All this reveals a composite picture and a rela-

⁷⁵ *Questions and Answers* 252.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 324; Basil, *Long Rules* 9.

⁷⁹ *Questions and Answers* 327.

⁸⁰ *Asceticon* 4. According to the *Rules of Rabbula*, monks who worked in agriculture could own a single work animal, such as a donkey, or a pair of oxen for ploughing the field (*The Rules of Rabbula*, 9, p. 29).

tively liberal attitude with regard to personal possessions in this monastic culture.⁸¹

The classic triad of activity—prayer, manual labour and meditation—with which the monk should occupy himself while secluded in his cell, was also the norm in the monastic communities of Gaza.⁸² They recognized the importance of ecclesiastical tradition regarding fixed hours of prayer for the cohesion of the community, but in general, adhered to the Scetis tradition of unfixed hours for hymn chanting, and abstention from ode chanting. Instead, they incorporated their individual prayers and meditations into their routine of manual labor.⁸³

There are some references to the organization of labor in the monastic communities of Abba Isaiah, Seridus, and Dorotheus, though this subject is nowhere treated in detail. As in the Egyptian monastic tradition, the ascetic value of manual labor was emphasized⁸⁴ as well as the concept that work precludes thoughts that are prey for demons.⁸⁵ From the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah we learn only of rotating one-week stints in the kitchen,⁸⁶ but of no other specific occupations. The kitchen was apparently deemed to be a highly desirable place of work as it provided easy access to food. Thus monks who worked regularly in the kitchen of Seridus' monastery aroused envy among the others.⁸⁷ The kitchen was managed by the cook (μάγειρος), who was one of the officeholders in the monastery.⁸⁸ Besides kitchen work there were various manual tasks within the monastery and apparently seasonal agricultural labor outside it.⁸⁹ Basil considered weaving and shoemaking as ideal monastic occupations, though these are nowhere dealt with in our sources; building, carpentry, blacksmith, and farming were recognized by him as necessary, though not ideal for a monk.⁹⁰ In the case of Gaza, however, certain monks

⁸¹ For a somewhat stricter attitude toward personal possessions in Judean Desert monasticism, see Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, p. 96.

⁸² Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 1.4, 9.30; Dorotheus, *Letter* 1, SC 92, p. 488.

⁸³ *Questions and Answers* 143.

⁸⁴ Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 9.12; See also Basil, *On Ascetical Discipline* 1, PG 31, col. 649A; *Long Rules* 37.

⁸⁵ *Questions and Answers* 193.

⁸⁶ *Asceticon* 1.10.

⁸⁷ *Questions and Answers* 226.

⁸⁸ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 11.

⁸⁹ *Asceticon* 3.4, 5.1–2.

⁹⁰ For a partial classification of monastic manual labor, see Basil, *Long Rules* 38.

seem to have been occupied in copying or perhaps even writing books.⁹¹ Other offices in the monastery included those of cellarer (κελλαρίτης), gardener (κηπουρός), disciplinarian (κανονάρχης), guest-house manager (ξενοδόχος), and clinic director.⁹² Naturally the monks were not always satisfied with the work allotted to them and sometimes complained to the Old Men. We hear of a monk working as a carpenter in the monastery⁹³ who thought that the fact of his skills and work being confined to carpentry only caused him trouble and did not benefit him. He complained to John, who advised him that a monk cannot know whether or not he profits from his work—it is a demonic trick.⁹⁴

The duty of the gatekeeper was apparently considered one of great responsibility.⁹⁵ It was up to the gatekeeper to bar unwanted visitors from entering the monastery, as well as to warn against any external danger to the monastery. The task is somewhat reminiscent of that of a guard at an army camp. The gatekeeper should never fall asleep at his post. A monk who tended to get tired during his shift at the gate asked Barsanuphius to permit another monk to join him. But Barsanuphius did not encourage this; better to be alone at the gate, for that is strengthening, and use help only when absolutely necessary.⁹⁶ The gatekeeper was also required to assist with various small tasks that would frequently come up, such as carrying things from the kitchen or the cellar.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 3.23.

⁹² Dorotheus, *Instructions* 4, 11.

⁹³ *Questions and Answers* 553.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 554.

⁹⁵ On the duties of the gatekeeper in the monastery and the difficulties they involved, see the questions of a gatekeeper to Barsanuphius, *Questions and Answers* 359–360. The great importance assigned to the position of gatekeeper in a coenobium is reflected in the detailed set of gatekeeping rules included in the *Canons of Maruta* 51, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, pp. 131–34.

⁹⁶ *Questions and Answers* 359. On the duties of the gatekeeper in general, see *ibid.*, 288. See also the examples from the monastery of Choziba in the Judean Desert in *V. Georgii* 4.100.3–6, 28.126.8–9, ed. C. House, *Analecta Bollandiana* 7 (1888), pp. 95–144, and Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, p. 163.

⁹⁷ *Questions and Answers* 360.

CHAPTER TEN

SOCIAL INTERACTION

The hybrid monastic communities, combining communal and hermitic settlements—such as those of Abba Isaiah or Barsanuphius, John, and Seridus—created a special dynamic: the monk had to cultivate anchoritic values, yet live in constant interaction with his fellow monks to the monastery. This social reality—reflected and addressed in the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah and subsequently in the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John—produced tensions between the ascetic virtues and the difficulty of their realization on the one hand and the necessary social dynamics of the monastery, on the other.¹ In addition, the social framework created problems common to every social organization—feelings of jealousy, hatred and love; and a desire for social acceptability, success, honor, reputation, good relations with the abbot, etc. These problems acquired a peculiarly exaggerated character in the context of the monk's daily struggle with his human weaknesses. The monk was regarded as a soldier in an elite squad whose uniform was *apatheia*.² Following the sayings of the Fathers, Abba Isaiah maintained that if a man did not become like a statue, he could not live side by side with his neighbor, and that there was no worse passion than familiarity.³ The monastic ideal was epitomized in the guiding principles of monastery life: avoidance of attachment and social association with the other, abstention from judgement of the other,⁴ the suppression of pride and self-will, the outward manifestation of *apatheia*,⁵ and maintaining a serious demeanour.⁶ Among people, the monk had to behave as if he did

¹ One of the common difficulties was the boredom that beset the monk in his seclusion. See e.g. *Questions and Answers* 201, 205, 500, 562–564. Barsanuphius in fact regarded boredom as the beginning of perdition (according to *Apoph.* Poemen 149). See *Questions and Answers* 613.

² *Questions and Answers* 195–196.

³ *Asceticon* 30.

⁴ *Questions and Answers* 151.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁶ *Asceticon* 3.

not exist, as if he were dead to the others.⁷ This monastic ideal was reflected in the strictures against socializing—as advocated in the Pachomian *koinonia*. Any conversation between monks during work, or at night, in the dark room, was strictly forbidden, but signs could be used for necessary communication.⁸ Monks were also supposed to avoid looking at one another during work or prayer, or talking along the way.⁹ Unlike the Franciscan friars centuries later, however, a monk should not initiate social circumstances conducive to self-humiliation in order to increase his merits.¹⁰ The ascetic who could not conform to the ideal of absolute seclusion might maintain moderate social contacts, but he was forbidden to discriminate among the monks in these contacts;¹¹ and no monk might impose his company—whether for prayer or work in common—on a fellow monk who did not wish it.¹² These strictures reflected a view that heremitic monasticism was superior to coenobitic monasticism and stand in contrast to the Pachomian and Basilian idealization of coenobitic monasticism. John recommended that the anchoritic monk maintain his seclusion for the five weekdays and pass the two days of the weekend with his fellow monks.¹³ This was the common practice in the semi-coenobitic monastic centre of Nitria and was in fact the prevailing practice of the lauritic monasticism in the Judean Desert. In Seridus' monastery, however, there were ascetics, other than Barsanuphius and John, who strove for absolute monastic seclusion. In any event, the correct balance between seclusion and a modicum of social contact with other monks seems to have been a topic of deliberation among the ascetics.¹⁴ A certain hermit, expressing a desire for daily communion but not wanting it brought to him, asked John whether he should leave his cell daily for the communion.

⁷ *Questions and Answers* 173.

⁸ Bohairic *V. Pach.* 74, p. 98, 77, pp. 100–101; *Precepts* 60, p. 156; 94, p. 161; 116, p. 163; *Hors. Test.* 45, p. 213.

⁹ *Precepts* 7, p. 146; *Hors. Test.* 11, p. 200, 13, p. 201, 40, p. 210.

¹⁰ *Questions and Answers* 185.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 204, 206. On the equal friendship that must be shown to all monks of the monastery, see also Basil, *An Ascetical Discourse* 5, PG 31, col. 880A.

¹² *Questions and Answers* 322. In early Pachomian monasticism, where each monk had an individual cell, it was forbidden to visit the cell of another without permission. See Rousseau, *Pachomius*, p. 79.

¹³ *Questions and Answers* 211.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.

John's answer indicated that he should do so unless sick.¹⁵ This example seems to provide further proof of a rather tolerant and flexible attitude regarding various degrees of seclusion within the framework of Seridus' semi-anchoretic monastery. Absolute seclusion, however, required permission from the Old Men.¹⁶

Daily periods of seclusion were required of the monks in the coenobium. Abba Isaiah even forbade entrance to the cell of another and insisted that a monk should not leave his cell before the permitted hour.¹⁷ But this monastic routine does not seem to have been strictly regulated. In Abba Isaiah's monastery, in fact, there were even cells of two or more monks living together.¹⁸ In such cases the monks were required not to hold back anything from their cell-mates, and if sharing a cell with a superior, to consult him.¹⁹ Sharing a cell required even stricter measures against friendship or close association—vide Abba Isaiah's adamant stricture against two monks sharing the same mattress.²⁰ This was already a Pachomian instruction, specifying also that at least the distance of a forearm should be kept between two monks sleeping side by side.²¹

John recommended a middle path between seclusion and participation in the life of the monastery, without setting specific times for seclusion.²² Nevertheless, the hours of seclusion do not seem to have been greatly respected by the monks. Dorotheus complained that when he eventually found time for solitary retreat in his cell, friends—whether monks or laymen—would come to visit him.²³ At the same, time monks who were living in the coenobium could ask permission for a few days of retirement in order to do penance.²⁴

Friendship among monks of similar age, especially the young, was frowned upon. It prevented the monk from dedicating himself to

¹⁵ Ibid., 212.

¹⁶ Ibid., 208.

¹⁷ *Asceticon* 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 3, 36; 3, 38.

¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

²⁰ Ibid., 9.

²¹ See *Precepts* 95, p. 161. The *Canons of Maruta* similarly warn against two monks sharing the same pillow (*Canons of Maruta* 54, 19, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, p. 142). On homoerotic phenomena in Pachomius and Shenoute's monasteries, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, p. 96; Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, p. 26.

²² *Questions and Answers* 314–315.

²³ Ibid., 316.

²⁴ Ibid., 239.

compunction (πένθος) and remorse for his sins.²⁵ A young monk should not sympathize with the suffering of another, since that would distract his mind from pondering his own death to the world—a virtue achieved only by the perfect ascetic.²⁶ In the framework of the monastery's communal life a monk should avoid intimate relations with other monks.²⁷ But monks were permitted to visit their fellows for common prayer or for help in work, albeit with great discretion. John clarified that upon such a visit one had to ask the fellow monk three times for permission; if he refused one should give up the idea.²⁸ Certain conditions created a situation less bound by monastic discipline, examples being: working together in the monastery or especially outside it, and going on a joint journey or mission on behalf of the monastery—a frequent occurrence in this rural monasticism. These circumstances were addressed in Abba Isaiah's instructions to the monks.²⁹ Co-workers were required to abstain from talking or becoming friends during joint work and from comparing the products of their manual labor.³⁰ On the road, constant silence should be kept among fellow monks, and when resting they should not cover themselves with a single blanket.³¹ On the other hand Abba Isaiah consented to a modicum of laxity—normally reserved for guests—due to the harsh realities of road travel: he allowed for an oil massage of the feet by a fellow monk.³²

Although monastic leaders strove to control and minimize social interaction, jealousy and hatred as well as feuds and violence among monks were not infrequent. One monk, for instance, became angry whenever he saw another monk.³³ Another, working with a friend,

²⁵ Ibid., 340. See also Basil, *On the Renunciation of the World and Spiritual Perfection* 5, PG 31, col. 637B.

²⁶ *Questions and Answers* 341.

²⁷ Ibid., 343.

²⁸ Ibid., 322.

²⁹ *Asceticon* 1. Special regulations for monks during their stay outside the monastery also existed in Shenoute's monastery. See Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, p. 27.

³⁰ *Asceticon* 1.

³¹ Ibid., 3. See Basil's general recommendation that young monks should not lie close together and an elderly monk should lie in between (*On the Renunciation of the World and Spiritual Perfection* 5, PG 31, col. 637B–C).

³² *Asceticon* 3.

³³ *Questions and Answers* 501.

was beaten by him, following which he turned to Barsanuphius and asked to be separated from that co-worker. The Old Man responded that he should treat his violent friend as a patient and persevere with tolerating him.³⁴ Dorotheus, too, reported cases of violent conduct against him by other monks of the monastery.³⁵ The daily communal meal could also give rise to tensions among the monks. Some were in the habit of finishing their meal quickly and leaving the table in order to restrain themselves from eating more. This early departure, which required permission from the abbot, led to complaints by other monks who raised the issue with John. But the Old Man rebuked the critical monks, pointing out that only the perfect ascetic has the capacity to remain at the table without eating.³⁶ Abba Isaiah disallowed sitting together after communal prayer or a meal for conversation; the monk should return to his cell to mourn his sins and not sit and talk with other monks, unless it was with "Old Men," and even that only with the permission of the abbot.³⁷ Abba Isaiah did acknowledge the social need for conversation but demanded limiting it as far as possible.³⁸

The fear of gossip and defamation was a constant concern. A monk asked Barsanuphius whether a discussion between two monks about the deed of a third brother constituted a defamation or a judgement, be it only in thought. The Old Man's reply was that if the conversation took place without passion there was no need to fear defamation.³⁹ Other questions also arose regarding the appropriate behavior for a monk upon hearing bad things said about himself or others.⁴⁰

Highly important for understanding the relationships among the monks is the series of over ninety questions directed to Barsanuphius and John by their disciple Dorotheus. He was in charge of the

³⁴ Ibid., 483.

³⁵ Dorotheus, *Instructions* 4, 7. On violence among monks in monasteries, see also *The Rules Attributed to Rabbula* 10, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, p. 81; *Canons of Maruta* 54.5–6, in Vööbus, *ibid.*, p. 139, where violence of monks against the abbot is also mentioned.

³⁶ *Questions and Answers* 545–546.

³⁷ *Asceticon* 1, 3.32.

³⁸ Ibid., 1.

³⁹ *Questions and Answers* 608.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 559–561.

infirmary in the monastery of Seridus, and some of his questions deal with his relationships with the other monks of the coenobium— young and veteran.⁴¹ He raised problems arising from the reality of life in a community regulated by an unwritten code of discipline and obedience to the abbot and where a certain hierarchy and distinction existed as between veteran, experienced monks and the younger ones.⁴² For example, when walking with a superior, a young monk should never walk ahead of him.⁴³ External expressions of humility were encouraged and highly valued because of the pain they inflicted;⁴⁴ it was regarded as beneficial to a monk to be humiliated by his brothers. Such expressions of humility included acts of prostration before veteran monks and begging pardon for everything.⁴⁵ Dorotheus' dilemma was whether he should carry out acts of humility intentionally or just at random, so as not to appear excessive.⁴⁶ It emerges that Barsanuphius and John regarded it as their duty to intervene in the minute details of the daily norms of conduct to bring about ideal monastic behavior.

Abba Isaiah, as well as Barsanuphius and John, discussed the monastic habit of a veteran ascetic—a spiritual father or guide—living in seclusion with a disciple who also served as his servant. The teachers were not always chosen by their disciples, assignments being made by the abbot.⁴⁷ This habit of pairing a heremitic novice with a veteran often created tensions and problems in the relations between them. These novices often complained to the Old Men of feeling exploited by their masters, as indeed they may have been.⁴⁸ Such tensions and dissatisfaction could naturally be frustrating to both master and disciple-servant. In one such case the offended servant-

⁴¹ On the correspondence between Dorotheus and the two Old Men, see Neyt, *Les lettres à Dorothee dans la correspondance de Barsanuphe et de Jean de Gaza*.

⁴² On Dorotheus' complex relations with other monks in the coenobium and his ongoing struggle against his social propensities, see chap. 6, above. On the reverence toward veteran monks required from young monks in the coenobium, see also Basil, *On the Renunciation of the World and Spiritual Perfection* 8, PG 31, col. 644A; *On Ascetical Discipline* 1, PG 31, col. 648D.

⁴³ *Asceticon* 5.

⁴⁴ *Questions and Answers* 278.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 302; Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 2.

⁴⁶ *Questions and Answers* 302.

⁴⁷ *Asceticon* 5; *Questions and Answers* 248. On the role of a personal servant to a veteran monk, see John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow* 138, PG 83/3, 3001.

⁴⁸ *Questions and Answers* 233, 251, 503.

monk was not propitiated by Barsanuphius' answer; he felt guilty despite the support of both the abbot and the other monks. Despairing of serving properly, he left the monastery secretly.⁴⁹ In other cases of mismatching, the master was incapable of answering his disciple's pressing questions, creating a dilemma for the latter of whether to leave the old man and seek another—which would obviously have been offensive to his master. Barsanuphius, John, and Seridus had to deal discreetly with such situations.⁵⁰ Complaints and dissatisfaction with the fathers, however, were not the general rule; they were normally respected and venerated by the younger monks, and their company—whether at a meal or in prayer—was considered a great honor. We hear of a monk who invited one of the fathers to dine with him in his cell, but the father declined. Another monk asked the same father to come and pray with him in his cell; the father entered and the monk imposed on the father to dine with him. When the first monk heard of it, he was grieved.⁵¹

Mirroring the social and material reality of anchoritic life, certain tensions evolved also around the organization of the individual cells of hermits in the lauritic section of Seridus' monastery. For example, a monk sought the permission of the abbot (Seridus) to settle in a cell close to those of the Old Men. The abbot's agreement notwithstanding, a second monk, in a nearby cell, apparently disturbed by the monk's proximity, asked that he move to another cell. For that, the permission of the Old Men and of the abbot was needed, but John decreed that the first monk should stay where he was.⁵² Apart from demonstrating the supervision of the monastic cells by the abbot, this affair further indicates the close involvement of the Old Men in the petty aspects of the life of the community, as well as reflecting the vast potential for tension among hermits living in nearby cells.

The reality of life in the monastery was more complex and variegated than is normally portrayed in the rather stereotyped descriptions furnished by monastic literature. Even minimal relations of ownership and property generated interactions among the monks.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 490.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 504.

⁵¹ Ibid., 455.

⁵² Ibid., 485.

For instance, a monk often regarded his cell as his personal possession and under certain circumstances could in fact own it.⁵³ The acquisition of cells around the monastery could apparently be initiated by individual monks but required the permission of the abbot. This rule, however, may not have been clearly defined. A few monks acquired cells near the monastery without the permission of the abbot (Seridus), who was furious about what he regarded as an act of disobedience and wanted to expel them. When consulted on this matter, Barsanuphius declared their conduct to be tantamount to a revolt.⁵⁴ The authority of the abbot extended also to the supervision of transfers from one cell to another. Cells were consequently lent, borrowed and leased for periods that varied in length of time.⁵⁵ A striking example is provided by a certain monk who acquired a second cell. When a fellow monk in need of a cell asked permission to settle in the new cell, the owner demanded a signed contract in obligating the tenant to carry two buckets of water for him every week, subject to the consent of the Old Men. Barsanuphius ruled that it was inappropriate for monks to draw up or sign written contracts; he stipulated that they should rather arrange the terms without a contract, while nevertheless confirming that it was the right of the cell owner to expel the monk should he wish to do so.⁵⁶ This episode clearly indicates that the monastic cell was regarded here as the property of the monk who built it, and that setting leasing terms and contracts—whether oral or written—was common practice. The unexpected reality of leasing cells among the hermits of the monastery naturally raised the issue of responsibility for their maintenance. Were such expenses the responsibility of the owner or of the tenant? Barsanuphius, who had already conceded the right of possession of a monastic cell, now rebuked the petitioning tenant for his pettiness: there was no room for such questions; even if the tenant took care of the maintenance and would later leave the cell, another monk would come and benefit from it.⁵⁷ Barsanuphius' "bourgeois" stance

⁵³ On the monastic cell as the private property of a monk in Egyptian monasticism, see Wipszycka, "Le monachisme égyptien et les villes," p. 42.

⁵⁴ *Questions and Answers* 550.

⁵⁵ Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 5.36–37.

⁵⁶ *Questions and Answers* 486.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 487.

reflects a communal approach. Order had to be maintained, and leased property needed to be maintained despite the modest scale of heremitic monastic subsistence.

The ideal of monastic life created a constant tension between the monastic community and the outside world, threatening the fragile existence of monastic society. Nevertheless, a monastery could not survive without a modicum of contact with the external world. This was particularly true for the forms of rural monasticism prevailing in the region of Gaza. Monasteries also depended to a certain extent on the financial support of their lay clientele, and their prestige often reflected the number and prominence of their visitors. In many monasteries especially in Syria and Egypt,⁵⁸ and in some Judean Desert monasteries,⁵⁹ this realization resulted in a growing interest in guests and hence in the cultivation of a generally positive attitude toward them. In contrast, an essentially reserved attitude toward guests was prevalent in Pachomian monasticism and in the monastic circle of Gaza, and was also advocated by Cassian. Pachomius did not allow outside monks to visit those inside the monastery; they could come only as far as the gate.⁶⁰ This applied also to relatives, and the monk himself had to be accompanied by another monk during such visits.⁶¹ Like other guests, not even visiting priests and clerics would eat with the monks of a monastery; all visitors shared a separate eating place.⁶² Cassian claimed that the visits of monks and sick people to a monastery, and in general, the preoccupation with hospitality to outsiders, were detrimental to the ideal of contemplation (*theoria*). He was especially harsh regarding visiting monks, asserting that it was the devil who persuaded them to visit other monasteries as a way of tempting them out of their own monastery.⁶³ Cassian, who favoured coenobitic over hermitic monasticism, criticized the

⁵⁸ See I. Penă, *The Amazing Life of the Syrian Monks in the 4th–6th Centuries* (Milan, 1992), pp. 126–128; P. Escolan, *Monachisme et Église. Le monachisme syrien du IV^e au VII^e siècle: un monachisme charismatique* (Paris, 1999), pp. 183–225; Wipszycka, “Le monachisme égyptien et les villes,” p. 35.

⁵⁹ *V. Charitonis* 17, 29.10–13; *V. Euthymii* 59, 7–8; Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 196–200.

⁶⁰ Bohairic *V. Pach.* 40. *Pachomian Koinonia* vol. III, pp. 63–64.

⁶¹ *Pachomian Koinonia* vol. II, *Precepts* 53, p. 154.

⁶² See Rousseau, *Pachomius*, pp. 149–151.

⁶³ Cassian, *Conferences* 1.12, vol. I, p. 90; 1.20, vol. I, p. 103.

habits of hospitality in the hermitic setting and declared that a solitary monk should perform the duty of hospitality toward a fellow monk in only the most minimal way so as to avoid laxity in ascetic discipline. This meant offering the guest nothing but the regular meal. Cassian was critical of anchorites who frequently compromised their ascetic routine, satisfying their own material desires under the pretext of hospitality.⁶⁴ Basil forbade the monks to speak to guests without the permission of the abbot; yet at the same time he advocated a special attitude toward guests and preparing for them an exceptionally good meal. In the *Long Rules*, however, there is little evidence of the reserved attitude toward guests expressed in the *Ascetical Discourse*.⁶⁵ Existential necessity, then generated an ongoing tension between opposing intentions, entailing a constant struggle regarding the relations of the closed community with the outside world. This is seen primarily in the code of behavior and proscriptions applied to representatives of the monastery in their contacts with society, as well as to meetings with guests within the monastery. Not only laymen but foreign monks as well were perceived as a threat to the fragile social fabric of the monastic community. Thus a conscious distinction developed between the monks of the monastic community and other monks. John declared to Dorotheus that the monks of the monastery were distinct from other monks in that they formed “one body” (ἐν σῶμα).⁶⁶ Abba Isaiah actually advocated a “monastic” style of walking: A monk should walk with his hands on his belt, not let them hang loose like lay people.⁶⁷ The reserved attitude prevalent in Pachomian monasticism was adopted by Abba Isaiah, though his approach seems somewhat more liberal. Even with guest monks conversation had to be restricted to a minimum and all curiosity curbed.⁶⁸ At the same time the hosting monks had to appear hospitable and cordial when receiving guests. Abba Isaiah, in fact, allowed washing the feet of guest monks and soothing them with oil, an act involving some intimacy and physical contact, which was apparently the custom also in Pachomian monasteries.⁶⁹ Hospitality

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.16, vol. I, p. 136; 8.1., vol. II, pp. 9–10; 19.6, vol. III, p. 44.

⁶⁵ *An Ascetical Discourse* 4, PG 31, col. 877C–D; *Long Rules* 20.

⁶⁶ *Questions and Answers* 289. See also Basil of Caesarea, *Long Rules* 7.

⁶⁷ *Asceticon* 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.9, 5.20.

⁶⁹ *Asceticon* 3.46–48; *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. II, *Precepts* 51, pp. 153–154.

could also include washing the clothes of the guest.⁷⁰ The *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah further reflects the habit of itinerant monks, or those traveling on duty, to stop at the monasteries of their acquaintances for rest.⁷¹

The problematic attitude of the monastic community to this issue is exemplified in a short series of questions and answers exchanged between Dorotheus and his spiritual father John. Dorotheus' social impulses and curiosity constantly impelled him to address questions to monastery visitors, whether laymen or monks, and he consulted John regarding this weakness. John regarded this inclination negatively but suggested that Dorotheus should act according to the abbot's opinion or address his questions to the guest through the abbot;⁷² a stance already advocated by Basil, stating that a monk should not answer the questions of foreigners even when he knew the answers, but should direct them to the abbot or his deputies.⁷³

The guiding principles for contact with monastery guests was uninvolvedness and avoidance of contact. In the event of an accidental encounter with guests, one should not be detained in prolonged conversation but rather depart on the pretext of a task to be performed.⁷⁴ But, Dorotheus persisted, what if the encounter occurred when he was comfortably seated? What should he do then? John answered that if the guest approached him while he was at leisure, he should tell him that the abbot forbade conversing without permission. If, however, the guest approached him and sat next to him during his work, then he must find some excuse to get up and leave.⁷⁵ When Dorotheus explicitly inquired John about Abba Isaiah's particular teachings on the subject, John replied that while adhering to the minimal rules of courtesy and hospitality, a negative attitude to contact with visitors should as a rule be strictly maintained.⁷⁶ Dorotheus then inquired whether disengagement from the guest should be gradual or abrupt. The answer was that termination of the conversation should be immediate.⁷⁷ Another question relating to the general

⁷⁰ *Asceticon* 3.49.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.50–52.

⁷² *Questions and Answers* 308.

⁷³ *Long Rules* 45.

⁷⁴ *Questions and Answers* 309.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 312.

attitude to guests was how to treat sick visitors who came to the infirmary. It was part of Dorotheus' duties to talk with patients, and he wondered whether he did so to gratify his own will rather than in order to treat them. John's answer was that with patients, too, Dorotheus had to be on guard and stick to the bare essentials.⁷⁸

Following the death of Abbot Seridus, his successor, Aelianus, turned to John for advice and guidance on various aspects of managing the monastery. A series of ten questions and answers dealt with the attitude toward guests. Aelianus, presupposing a different treatment of various categories of guests, asked the abbot how should he receive laymen,⁷⁹ veteran monks (fathers), and ordinary monks? Disregarding such categorizations, John's answer, in essence, was that one should act tactfully so as not to offend, but be wary of guests coming to the monastery solely in order to eat and drink. As a rule restraint must be maintained also while dining with them, not allowing the guests to engage in conversation regarding material matters. Unsurprisingly, John advised that conversation with guests should be directed toward the sayings of the Desert Fathers (*Apophthegmata*) and the Scriptures.⁸⁰ Betraying his suspicious disposition toward guests, John instructed that poor people coming to the monastery to seek welfare should be treated with generosity but carefully scrutinized for the possibility that they were thieves or trying to exploit the monastery.⁸¹

By the end of the fourth century a negative attitude toward itinerant monks had emerged in Egyptian monasticism. Originally manifesting a radical form of the ideal of *xeniteia*, they now came to be perceived as a source of trouble and a burden on the monastic community. Wandering asceticism thus became somewhat demonized and associated with social disturbance.⁸² A severe attitude toward itinerant monks—widely shared by Christian leaders—prevailed also in the monastic corpus of Gaza. These ascetic vagabonds (κυκλευτής, περίακτος) should not be admitted to the monastery, because they

⁷⁸ Ibid., 313. See also *ibid.*, 548, regarding a sick monk who came to the monastery for treatment and was given a cell of another monk, who was offended because of that.

⁷⁹ On visits of laymen to fathers of the monastery, see also *ibid.*, 715.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 584.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 587.

⁸² See Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, pp. 38–41.

were a source of trouble. They should be given something and sent away, and under no circumstance be permitted to enter the monastery, however persistently they demanded it.⁸³ The following cases are illustrative: During the time of Abbot Seridus, a monk who used to visit the monastery and was fond of scandalizing the monks with his words and conduct, took certain belongings of the monastery in Seridus' name, without the abbot's knowledge. Discovering it, Seridus forbade the monk to revisit the monastery. The monk, however, deviously entered the compound through a backway. Discovered by the gatekeeper, he was reported to Seridus, who ordered his removal from the monastery forthwith.⁸⁴ Aelianus later consulted John on whether or not to admit the persistent monk to the monastery should he return. John's reply was, quite expectedly, negative.⁸⁵ Another case involved a monk-priest who was accustomed to visit the monastery and harass the monks, and was requesting Abbot Aelianus' permission to settle in the vicinity of the monastery. Consulted in this matter, John replied that the monk-priest should be allowed neither to enter the monastery nor to settle nearby.⁸⁶

The tendency of the monastic leadership to exercise absolute control over the monks even in seemingly trivial matters is clearly manifested in its almost paranoid attitude toward monks who had to spend time outside the monastery. Detailed instructions and advice were formulated to guide the ascetic moral behavior in these circumstances, and the monks' obedience to the abbot's instructions for the mission was strictly supervised. Monks were often on the road for seasonal agricultural work⁸⁷ or to sell the products of the monastery in the local markets—a common reality in rural monasticism.⁸⁸ Basil recommended travelling in groups and not individually to sell products in the markets.⁸⁹ Moreover, the rules attributed to Rabbula, explicitly forbade monks to enter villages. The right to do so was

⁸³ *Asceticon* 3.50; *Questions and Answers* 588. A negative attitude toward itinerant monks visiting solitary monks is also reflected in Pachomian writings; they were thought to spread vicious gossip about these hermits. See Bohairic *V. Pach.* 88, pp. 114–115.

⁸⁴ *Questions and Answers* 592.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 592.

⁸⁶ *Questions and Answers* 591.

⁸⁷ *Asceticon* 5.1–9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 52.

⁸⁹ *Long Rules* 39.

reserved to the monk appointed to act as the agent of the monastery, who was strictly instructed not to associate with laymen and sojourn only in a church or a monastery.⁹⁰ A further interaction with the outside world, was occasioned by monks being sent on missions on behalf of the monastery. All these types of ongoing social interaction were of considerable concern to the monastic leadership, who saw great danger not only to the ascetic discipline of these monks but to the monastic society as a whole. A similar fear was felt in Pachomian monasteries, where monks were forbidden to leave the monastery alone and upon their return were barred from speaking about their experiences.⁹¹ It is noteworthy that unlike the Judean Desert or Sinai monasticism—marked by its cosmopolitan character—the rural monasticism of the Gaza region had a strong component of indigenous monks. When these monks visited their former nearby villages to arrange various matters, they were very likely to encounter, even involuntarily, parents, relatives, and former friends. Abba Isaiah therefore deemed it necessary to admonish his monks not to treat their relatives intimately and to avoid long conversations with them.⁹² A similar stance appears already in Pachomian sources, where monks visiting their families—mostly in cases of sickness—would normally avoid eating in their company.⁹³

On missions outside the monastery, monks might sojourn with lay devotees of the monastery. Veteran monks (fathers) would also visit lay devotees for the latter's edification, participating in informal discussions and debates on matters of faith.⁹⁴ A lay devotee accustomed to host monks asked John whether it was permissible to host monks who were strangers to him. John recommended inquiring about them first.⁹⁵ But these visits often generated social circumstances somewhat incompatible with strict ascetic morality. Abba Isaiah addressed the issue of conduct in the company of a layman host,⁹⁶ and it was further raised in various questions to Barsanuphius and John.⁹⁷ One

⁹⁰ *The Rules of Rabbula for the Monks* 3, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, p. 27.

⁹¹ *Precepts* 56–57, 86, pp. 156, 160; Rousseau, *Pachomius*, p. 150.

⁹² *Asceticon* 4, 57.

⁹³ *Precepts* 54, p. 155; Rousseau, *Pachomius*, p. 151.

⁹⁴ *Questions and Answers* 682; 695.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 727.

⁹⁶ *Asceticon* 3.54.

⁹⁷ See e.g. *Questions and Answers* 354–357.

monk deliberated whether to accept an invitation to dine without the prior permission of the abbot. John replied that this was permissible only when absolutely necessary and no harm could come of it.⁹⁸ Obedience to the Abbot during journeys extended even to acts of religious devotion not specifically authorized by the abbot; no room was left for spontaneous devotional behavior. On a mission to Jerusalem the monk descended to the Jordan to pray without permission from the abbot and was now concerned about whether he had acted properly. John rebuked him, saying that the main thing was to obey the instructions of the abbot. More rigorous measures were advocated in such a case by Basil; who recommended interrogating the monastery's emissary on his return from his mission.⁹⁹ John, however, specified that during a mission, where no definite instructions had been issued, one must act according to the circumstances.¹⁰⁰ But deviations from the abbot's instructions were not always without suspect intentions, as in the case of the veteran monk who on visiting a city went to the races at the hippodrome.¹⁰¹ Thus the abbot's concern was apparently not totally unfounded.

A circle of lay clientele would visit the fathers in the monastery, host monks on leave from the monastery, perform certain services for the monastery, and contribute toward its general welfare.¹⁰² It is difficult to judge the importance of this circle's benefactions to the economic life of the monastery, but the handling and distribution of these benefactions did present certain difficulties. A portion of these donations was also distributed among the poor of the vicinity. But a burning question was whether it was proper to accept presents in the first place, even for distribution among the poor. Such dilemmas are better understood if one bears in mind that Pachomian leadership adopted a strictly negative stance toward gifts from relatives and friends including gifts of such necessary items as a tunic or mantle. Food gifts, though, could be accepted for the monastery's clinic.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Ibid., 355.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 356; Basil, *Long Rules* 44.

¹⁰⁰ *Questions and Answers* 357.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 453.

¹⁰² See e.g. the case of a lawyer who was a friend of the monastery and acted on behalf of the abbot to arrange certain legal affairs, *Questions and Answers* 745.

¹⁰³ *Pachomian Koinonia* vol. III, *The Book of our Father Horsiesios* (*Hors. Test.*) 39, p. 200; *Precepts* 53, p. 155.

John stated that only those hermits no longer needing to mourn their sins, could accept gifts. Moreover, the donors themselves should distribute their presents, as Hilarion had instructed.¹⁰⁴ Benefactors sometimes set preconditions for their donations, such as that a specific monk should distribute them. But John was unequivocal in rejecting such a request; it contradicted an ascetic principle. Even if one saw a man dying of hunger outside his cell a monk should not distribute the possessions of another person—the donor must do it himself or himself find another person willing to do it for him.¹⁰⁵ Certain benefactors expected some material benefit from the monastery in return for their donation. Abbot Aelianus, for instance, raised the question of what to do if someone brought a gift to the monastery in the expectation of receiving something in exchange—whether or not to accept it from him, especially if it was a needed item. John advised accepting the item if it was essential but not as a donation; its full price should be paid.¹⁰⁶

When monks from well-to-do families joined the monastery, they often left some of their wealth with their relatives, and this could later become a cause for dispute. Such was the case of Dorotheus. His relatives had possessions of his savings, which he now wished to distribute to the poor, but they were reluctant to return the money to him. Consulted on the right course of action, John ruled that some hardness and insensibility was sometimes needed in dealing with evil.¹⁰⁷ Basil also dealt with the problem of property left in the care of relatives. Acknowledging the difficulties that might arise he nevertheless recommended not suing relatives in court for their illegal handling of the monk's property.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Questions and Answers* 618. See Jerome, *V. Hil.* 18. This is the only place where Hilarion is mentioned in the correspondence.

¹⁰⁵ *Questions and Answers* 619.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 594.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁰⁸ *Long Rules* 9.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE FATE OF THE ANTI-CHALCEDONIAN COMMUNITY

The foregoing chapters have outlined the historical development of the monastic centre of Gaza and delineated the central traits of its cultural profile. In this concluding chapter we wish to tackle an enigmatic problem touching on the transition between the two major historical stages of Gaza monasticism—namely, the change from the anti-Chalcedonian hegemony in the days of Peter the Iberian, Abba Isaiah, and Severus to the Chalcedonian heyday of Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheus and the seemingly abrupt disappearance of anti-Chalcedonian monasticism in the region.

As depicted earlier in this study, the Gaza region in the second half of the fifth century became the centre of anti-Chalcedonian resistance in Palestine, led by the famous figures of Gaza monasticism. Peter the Iberian and his circle and Abba Isaiah of Egypt led this resistance, supported primarily, it seems, by a network of monasticism that had developed in the region. The story is relatively well known from the works of John Rufus, the disciple and biographer of Peter the Iberian, and Zacharias the Rhetor.¹ Although sparsely recorded in the sources, Chalcedonian monasticism presumably coexisted in the region alongside its anti-Chalcedonian counterpart, though it may have maintained a low profile during the period of monastic ascendancy. While there are indications that anti-Chalcedonian monasticism in the region enjoyed considerable popular support among town dwellers—for example in Maiuma, Gaza, Ascalon, and Azotus²—there is no explicit evidence for a wide popular support among the rural population. In fact, it may be that this population was more inclined to support the hegemonic Chalcedonian camp or was perhaps simply disinterested in the Christological polemics of the time.

¹ For this phase in the history of monasticism in the Gaza region, see chap. 1, above.

² See chap. 1, above.

Following the death of Peter the Iberian and Abba Isaiah (491),³ Gaza anti-Chalcedonian monasticism was led by the followers recruited by Peter the Iberian from the Beirut circle of law students. Prominent in this circle was the famous Severus of Antioch, who became first a leader of anti-Chalcedonian Gaza and Palestinian monasticism, and subsequently an outstanding leader of this camp in the empire. Zacharias, in his biography of his friend Severus, describes the successful efforts of Nephalius to oust anti-Chalcedonian monks from their monasteries in the region and supplant them with Chalcedonians, a move that disturbed the atmosphere of coexistence between Monophysites and Chalcedonians in the region.⁴ But his success was short-lived and the situation was reversed through Severus' intimate relationship with Emperor Anastasius.⁵ The last available report of anti-Chalcedonian monasticism in the Gaza region seems to describe the time just before the ordination of Severus as patriarch of Antioch. We may assume that the hegemony of anti-Chalcedonian monasticism continued in the region until at least 518, when the Chalcedonian Emperor Justin ascended the throne following the death of Anastasius. The changing politico-ecclesiastical climate under Justin and his nephew Justinian led to the expulsion of anti-Chalcedonian bishops and monks from Syria (525–531)⁶ and anti-Chalcedonian Palestinian abbots and monks were expelled to Egypt.⁷ It may be that this also spelled the end of the monastic stronghold that had been formed in the southern coastal plain around Peter the Iberian and the members of his circle. The only intimation regarding the fate of Peter the Iberian's leading monastery near Maiuma is a passing reference to it by John of Ephesus: "... a great convent called that of father Peter the Iberian This convent was expelled with the rest, and came to the territory of Alexandria."⁸

Our two primary sources for the monasticism of the region in the period that follows are first, the circle of Barsanuphius, John, and Seridus at Thabatha and their disciples who edited and transmitted the rich correspondence of Barsanuphius and John; and second, the

³ Devos, "Quand Pierre l'Ibère vint-il à Jérusalem?" p. 350.

⁴ V. Severi, 100–103; Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 148–51.

⁵ V. Severi, 103–111; Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 151–53.

⁶ Ps. Zacharias, *HE* VIII.5.

⁷ Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* I.55, p. 183.

⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (John of Hephæstopolis), p. 527.

circle of their disciple Dorotheus and his disciples, who transmitted his *Instructions* and letters and produced the *Life of Dositheus*. This monastic circle appears to have adopted a Chalcedonian stance. Barsanuphius, John, and Seridus were active roughly between the third and fifth decades of the sixth century, and Dorotheus' activity continued into the second half of the sixth century. Thus hardly any time elapsed between the hegemony of the Beirut circle and the rise of Seridus' monastery.

At this point the question arises as to what might have happened to that tight anti-Chalcedonian monastic network. Were monasteries destroyed or abandoned? Were monks expelled—as implied by Severus and John of Ephesus—and supplanted by Chalcedonians? Did they perhaps accept Chalcedon, adapting to the new imperial ecclesiastical policy? Or did they go underground, adopting an outward Chalcedonian veneer.

Lacking virtually any evidence apart from the legacy of Seridus' monastery and Dorotheus' circle, we can only try to make deductions from the available sources. We would like to propose here the speculative hypothesis that Barsanuphius and John, and perhaps even Dorotheus, were in fact something of crypto-Monophysites. Naturally, had their leanings been obvious, there would have been no need for any such speculation. We may also pose this issue in a negative way—namely, what substantive proof do we have for their supposed Chalcedonian stance? The answer to this question might prove inconclusive, but we would like to consider here possible positive arguments supporting this suggestion.

Thabatha, the birthplace of Hilarion, had already established certain anti-Chalcedonian connections in the previous generation. It is one of the recorded places where Peter the Iberian had established himself with his entourage at the invitation of a wealthy inhabitant of the town.⁹ We may thus deduce that an anti-Chalcedonian following existed among the population of the place prior to the establishment of Seridus' monastery.

The monastic legacy of Abba Isaiah—primarily in his *Asceticon*—is central to the monastic teachings of Barsanuphius and John, as was amply demonstrated by François Neyt.¹⁰ It can be argued, however,

⁹ *V. Petri Iberi* 101.

¹⁰ Neyt, "Citations 'Isaïennes' chez Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza."

that the *Asceticon* lacks any explicit content and could hence be easily adopted by Chalcedonians as well as later by Nestorians.¹¹ Nevertheless it would seem that in the short interval following his death the image of Abba Isaiah of Gaza as a prominent anti-Chalcedonian figure would have obstructed such an easy adoption of his authority—unless, of course, we reject the attribution of the *Asceticon* to him.¹² Abba Isaiah's influence carried over to the next generation; it is evident in the writings of Zosimas, who may be broadly associated with the Gaza monastic circle in its Chalcedonian phase and whose work influenced Dorotheus; it is also evident in the writings of the latter. Both these writers, however, in contrast to Barsanuphius and John, seem already hesitant to mention Abba Isaiah by name; they merely quote or paraphrase him anonymously.¹³

Although the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah deals primarily with issues of monastic guidance and spirituality, it also includes discussion of a theorizing nature that supplies something of an ideological framework for his monastic teachings. One such discussion involves his concept of nature and counter-nature as a tool for understanding our existential predicament in the state of counter-nature and the ideal of restoring the original human nature of Adam in paradise through the imitation of Christ, who had overcome the state of counter-nature. In Abba Isaiah's articulation of this concept there is a distinct absence of the two natures terminology, and its Monophysite implications were noted by Keller.¹⁴ The Monophysite implications of this concept thus become clear, as does Abba Isaiah's avoidance of the two natures terminology. A diphysite doctrine would render meaningless the central Christian dogma propounded by Abba Isaiah and empty ascetic life of its purpose. This concept of nature and counter-nature and its terminology—shown to be based on Monophysite assumptions—was adopted by Barsanuphius, albeit without elaboration in the existing correspondence,¹⁵ and was further adapted

¹¹ Chitty, "Abba Isaiah," p. 70; Guillaumont, "Une notice syriaque inédite sur la vie de l'abbé Isaïe," p. 360.

¹² See Draguet "Introduction au problème"; Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza?" pp. 33–34; Chitty, "Abba Isaiah."

¹³ See Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza?"

¹⁴ On Abba Isaiah's concept of nature and counter-nature, see chap. 6, above. For its Monophysite implications, see Keller, "L'abbé Isaïe," p. 125. For a theological profile of Abba Isaiah, see Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 286–95.

¹⁵ *Questions and Answers* 245.

by Dorotheus to his special emphasis on obedience in his theology of monastic life.¹⁶ The overall impression is that this monastic circle proudly regarded itself as heir to the monastic legacy of Abba Isaiah, despite his anti-Chalcedonian background.

The correspondence of Barsanuphius and John generally reflects the legacy of Abba Isaiah also regarding their negative attitude to theology and relatively anti-intellectual tendency.¹⁷ This attitude to theology may, however, reflect not merely a negative approach motivated by fear of doubt and heresy; it may also indicate a quietist monastic tendency eschewing any judgement of the other.¹⁸ This tendency is reflected in the position that one should not be hasty even in the condemnation of heretics.¹⁹

The consultations with Barsanuphius and John regarding the Origenist controversy of the sixth century reveal something of their essential attitude to theology. Although he condemned Origenist concepts in general Barsanuphius had in fact hardly addressed their content, nor had he elaborated his objections.²⁰ He emphasized that it was not important whether these views had been right or wrong, and that no one, including himself, should be preoccupied with them.²¹ Barsanuphius' principal attitude to theological issues was negative; he regarded theology as inessential to the ideal Christian way of monastic life. Yet, as mentioned earlier, at the same time it appears that Barsanuphius himself was well versed in the important writings of the Church Fathers and in mainstream theological issues. The positions of Barsanuphius and John were generally orthodox, although their essential attitude to theology seems to have generated a tolerant stance toward those holding non-orthodox theological views. In fact, as far as we can tell, the Council of Chalcedon is never mentioned in the correspondence, a fact that seems true also of the writings of Dorotheus, though this fact in itself does not amount to much. The Council of Nicaea—mentioned once in the correspondence—

¹⁶ See chap. 6, above.

¹⁷ See Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 26.18. This tendency was in fact expressed already by Zeno, an older contemporary of Abba Isaiah in the region of Gaza (*Apophthegmata*, alph. Zeno 4). See chap. 4, above.

¹⁸ On this monastic virtue in the *Apophthegmata*, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, pp. 123–132.

¹⁹ *Questions and Answers* 700.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 600.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 603.

is, according to John, the foundation of the Christian faith.²² But here too it is questionable whether a hidden Monophysite stance can be discerned in this outwardly general and orthodox statement. We would suggest that the outwardly tolerant and quietist attitude of Barsanuphius and John—who avoided theological controversy, in contrast to the zealous involvement of many monks and monastic leaders in the Christological polemics and ecclesiastical power struggles of the day—may in this case also stem from their peculiar position as crypto-Monophysites.²³

Two letters in the correspondence reflect the reality of religious persecution.²⁴ One is seemingly addressed to John by Monophysite laymen fearing persecution following a forthcoming ordination of certain clergymen who had opposed the ecclesiastical position of the emperor. They sought John's advice regarding the best course of action in face of the anticipated persecution.²⁵ If identification of the petitioners as Monophysites is valid, it may further enhance the impression of a neutral stance—possibly even crypto-Monophysite sentiments—on the part of the two Old Men. This impression can be seen as further strengthened by Barsanuphius' correspondence with Peter, the patriarch of Jerusalem (524–552), who during much of the time span covered by the correspondence may have entertained Monophysite leanings—at least until 536, when he was forced to cut his ties with the Monophysites and denounce them.²⁶ This is virtually all we have been able thus far to squeeze out of the monastic sources of Gaza in support of our experimental hypothesis.

But our story is not yet quite ended. Sophronius in the seventh century and Theodore of Studios (759–826) at the beginning of the ninth might offer some further assistance with the question under discussion here. The catalogue of heretics and heresies in the synodical epistle of Sophronius lists both Peter the Iberian and his associate (συνόμιλος) Isaiah among Monophysite leaders. They are followed by Severus of Antioch and a series of Monophysite personalities

²² Ibid., 702.

²³ For further discussion of Barsanuphius and John's attitude to theology, see chap. 4, above.

²⁴ *Questions and Answers* 703, 786.

²⁵ Ibid., 786.

²⁶ Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 195–201.

including a certain Dorotheus.²⁷ Further down, Sophronius offers a list of heresies among which he seems to lump together a few appellations assigned to various Monophysite factions: Eutychians, Acephaloi, Barsanuphians, Isaiahans, Agnoetae,²⁸ and Jacobites.²⁹ For the limited purpose addressed here it is of interest to know exactly who the Monophysites Isaiah, Barsanuphius, and Dorotheus were that Sophronius had in mind. The first mention of Isaiah seems quite clearly to refer to Abba Isaiah of Gaza, the famous companion of Peter the Iberian, though it might allude to a different Monophysite Isaiah.³⁰ But is Abba Isaiah also the eponym of the group that Sophronius called Isaiahans? And is Sophronius' Dorotheus to be identified with the protagonist of Gaza monasticism or with some other Dorotheus? And what about Barsanuphius? According to the sixth century here-siograph Liberatus, the appellation Isaiahans was given to a splinter group of followers of a certain Monophysite Isaiah, who contended for the patriarchate of Alexandria in succession to Peter Mongus.³¹ But we would suggest that it might as well refer to Abba Isaiah of Gaza. Similarly, the title Barsanuphians may refer to a certain eponymous bishop who may have headed a Monophysite splinter group whose appellation later derived from him, as is claimed by Timotheus Presbyter³² and by the eleventh-century Coptic historian Mawhub b. Mansur b. Mufarrij of Alexandria (c. 1025–1100). These Barsanuphians may have been a splinter group that developed among the Acephaloi adversaries of Peter Mongus and the *Henoticon* of Emperor Zeno (482) in the time of Damian, the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria (578–607). Centered at Fustat at the beginning of the ninth century they reunited with the Coptic Church under patriarch Mark II of Alexandria

²⁷ *Epistula Synodica*, PG 87, 3192B–C.

²⁸ On the identity of the Agnoetae see P. Schaff, "Agnoetae," in *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (Boston, 1877), vol. 1, p. 62.

²⁹ *Epistula Synodica*, PG 87, 3193C.

³⁰ The Eutychian bishop Isaiah of Hermopolis in the 470s, mentioned by Zacharias Rhetor, is a possible candidate (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 4,12). Another possible candidate is an Isaiah who, according to Liberatus, had contended for the patriarchate of Alexandria following the death of Peter Mongus (477–490). See Liberatus, *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum* 17, ed. E. Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 2.5 (Berlin and Leipzig, 1936), p. 132. The Monophysite "pseudo-bishop" Isaiah, whose maneuvers are recounted in detail by Severus, may also be considered. See Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* II.3, pp. 231–57.

³¹ Liberatus, *Breviarium* 17, p. 132; Timotheus Presbyter, *De Receptione Haereticorum* 14, PG 86, I, 45.

³² *De Receptione Haereticorum* 13.

(799–819).³³ But again, we would suggest that Sophronius' Barsanuphians may allude to the followers of Barsanuphius of Gaza rather than to those of the obscure Barsanuphius of the time of Patriarch Damian. The appearance of the two titles—i.e., Barsanuphians and Isaiahans—consecutively in Sophronius' list may further hint at a possible connection between them in Sophronius' mind,³⁴ though admittedly if the title Barsanuphians alludes to the above Egyptian group, then the title Isaiahans may equally refer to the other obscure Monophysite Egyptian faction. The name Dorotheus appears in Sophronius' list in a sequence of sixth-century Egyptian Monophysite figures. Hence a possible candidate for his identification may be the Dorotheus mentioned by Theophanes as a Monophysite bishop who was unlawfully ordained by the Theodosian faction in Alexandria—namely, the opponents of the party of Julian of Halicarnassus.³⁵ A less likely candidate is Dorotheus of Thessalonica (515–520). We should not entirely rule out, however, a possible identification of Sophronius' Dorotheus with Dorotheus of Gaza, especially if the guiding principle in Sophronius' list was chronological rather than geographical, which indeed seems to be the case. In fact, the Egyptian Dorotheus of Theophanes and Dorotheus of Gaza were practically contemporaries.

A charge was brought against Theodore of Studios (759–826) by a certain Pamphilus “from the East” for admitting the heretics Isaiah, Barsanuphius, and Dorotheus as orthodox. He fervently defended himself by distinguishing three orthodox leaders with the names Isaiah, Barsanuphius, and Dorotheus, to whom he added a fourth, a Dositheus, from their heretical namesakes anathematized by Sophronius.³⁶ He repeated this defence in a testament to his disciples that was later quoted as an introduction to the manuscripts of

³³ *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* (erroneously attributed to Severus b. al-Muqaffa' [d. after 987]), ed. B. Evetts, PO 1 (1907), 474–75; PO 10 (1917), 410–15. For the identity of the author as Mawhub, see J. den Heijer, *Mawhūb ibn Mansūr ibn Mufarrig et l'historiographie copte-arabe. Étude sur la composition de l'«Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie»* (Louvain, 1989).

³⁴ This sequence appears, however, also in Timotheus Presbyter, *De Receptione Haereticorum* 14, PG 86, I, 45.

³⁵ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6057 (564/5 C.E.), ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883–1885).

³⁶ *Ep.* 34 (to Pope Leo III [795–816]), PG 99, 1028A–B; Regnault and de Prévile, *Dorothee de Gaza*, pp. 107–9.

Dorotheus.³⁷ The persons mentioned were apparently held in high esteem in Byzantine monastic circles and were especially venerated by Theodore. The above Barsanuphius and Dorotheus were undoubtedly the two familiar monastic leaders who had bequeathed their writings to the Byzantine monastic tradition. Theodore's Isaiah, however, was obviously not the Monophysite holy man Abba Isaiah of Gaza but most likely the Isaiah of the *Apophthegmata*, apparently identified by him with Isaiah of the *Asceticon*, as distinct from Isaiah of Gaza, regardless of the possibility of their being one and the same.³⁸ But the fact that there was such an attack on these three figures clearly indicates that Theodore's Isaiah was identified by some with Abba Isaiah of Gaza—or perhaps with some other obscure Monophysite Isaiah—and that Barsanuphius and Dorotheus of Gaza were also considered among certain circles to be Monophysite heretics, or were at least regarded with suspicion. This identification was based on—or at least supported at that time by—Sophronius' above-mentioned catalogue of heretics and heresies.³⁹ In other words, Sophronius' Barsanuphius and Dorotheus, and probably his Isaiah as well, were now understood to be the historical monastic leaders of Gaza. Is it possible that we have here a certain notion regarding our protagonists that goes back to Sophronius himself and perhaps even to their own time? Theodore claimed that this question was investigated by Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople (784–806) and other authorities and that the three in question were proven orthodox, and in fact had had three heretical namesakes. Who these three namesakes were we are not told. Theodore further declared that he had found nothing impious in their teachings.⁴⁰ But this, admittedly, is exactly the reason for their admission. We have seen earlier how Abba Isaiah's writings could be adopted by the monastic tradition and παιδεία of both Chalcedonians and Nestorians; and this could have

³⁷ *Testamentum* PG 99, 1816B; Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothee de Gaza*, pp. 91–92; 107–9. See also *Correspondence*, SC 426, pp. 24–25. Here Theodore added to the list two persons, Mark and Hesychius, the latter probably to be identified as Hesychius of Jerusalem (d. after 451), who may have sympathized with the anti-Chalcedonians (John Rufus, *Plerophoriae* 10) and was accused posthumously of Monophysite leanings. See B. Baldwin, "Hesychios of Jerusalem," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford, 1991), vol. 2, p. 925.

³⁸ Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza?"

³⁹ *Ep.* 34, PG 99, 1028A–B; *Testamentum* PG 99, 1816B.

⁴⁰ PG 99, 1816B.

been even more easily achieved by Barsanuphius and Dorotheus, who were apparently regarded by most Byzantine ecclesiastics as Chalcedonians.

To sum up this short foray into speculative history, we would suggest that what took place in the monastic circle of Barsanuphius, John, Seridus, and Dorotheus—and perhaps in other Monophysite monastic centres in the Gaza region—as a reaction to the changing political ecclesiastical climate in the empire and in the region, was a transformation into a kind of crypto-Monophysitism, adopting a Chalcedonian or neo-Chalcedonian veneer and retreating to a monastic life of quietist piety and theological tolerance. These monastic circles continued to cherish the monastic legacy of Abba Isaiah, which was virtually free of any distinct traces of Monophysitism, despite his reputation as a Monophysite holy man. The success of their dissimulating tactics can be seen in their reception into mainstream Byzantine monastic orthodoxy. But the memory, or suspicion, of their Monophysite sympathies or crypto-Monophysitism persevered into the ninth century. We are well aware that our tentative exercise in reconstruction leans heavily on circumstantial evidence and interpretive speculations that may be easily demolished. But we hope that cumulatively it may offer at least some plausibility for the scenario we have proposed.

CONCLUSION

Between the fourth and seventh centuries a monastic colony developed in the region of Gaza deeply versed in previous ascetic literature, such as the rich Pachomian and Evagrian corpora, the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, and the ascetical writings of Basil. Nevertheless, as this comparative study makes clear, within this period a monastic school emerged that, while amalgamating these ascetic teachings, simultaneously deviated from them in certain respects, forging its own intellectual profile. We do not see the monastic culture of Gaza as a monolithic phenomenon, but rather as a spectrum of beliefs and practices shaping in various ways the life of its adherents. That this monastic community adhered primarily to the ascetic Egyptian tradition and retained only marginal Basilian influence is readily discerned from its literary corpus. It would be misleading, however, to characterize this school as a direct offshoot of Egyptian monasticism. In fact, the local and rural character of this monasticism resulted in a homogeneous community dominated by powerful charismatic personalities such as Zeno, Peter the Iberian, Abba Isaiah, Severus, Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheus. This ascetic centre succeeded in developing its own school of thought and practice precisely because its make-up was not cosmopolitan. Although many of its leaders were immigrants, it seems that most of the monks were provincials, the common and unifying language in the monasteries being Greek. Barsanuphius promoted the Greek language to the point of refusing to communicate in his native Coptic with Egyptian monks of the monastery who addressed him in that language. This stands in marked contrast to the cosmopolitan, multilingual character of the contemporary Judean Desert monasteries. The monastic school of Gaza was firmly rooted in earlier ascetic traditions, reshaping them through its interpretation and selective adoption, demonstrating that we are dealing here with a dynamic monastic culture in an ongoing process of shaping and reevaluating its own tradition. The close-knit homogeneous nature of this community is attested by the perseverance of cross-denominational ascetic tenets in this monastic school. The heated theological polemics of the time—particularly the Christological and

Origenist controversies—did not weaken the strong fibres of monastic heritage. This stance seems to have resulted from a deliberate and carefully calculated choice on the part of the monastic leaders of Gaza, their main guideline being the optimal cultivation of the ascetic imperative as they understood it. They adopted whatever they considered “useful for the soul,” regardless of its provenance; this was their only criterion for the acceptance of monastic authors—hence their promotion of readings from the Monophysite Abba Isaiah and the Origenist Evagrius.

The composite nature of the Gaza’s literary corpus stands in contrast to the one-dimensional hagiographic character of Judean Desert literature, which precludes a detailed reconstruction of the spiritual and intellectual profile of this monastic centre. Yet the close proximity of the Judean Desert monasteries to the prestigious Chalcedonian ecclesiastical centre that developed around the holy places in Jerusalem, the involvement of their monastic leaders in the patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the hegemony of Chalcedonian hagiography—mainly in the sixth-century *vitae* of Cyril of Scythopolis—overshadowed the flourishing anti-Chalcedonian monastic centre of Gaza. This situation created an imbalance in the historiographic picture of Palestinian monasticism in late antiquity, an imbalance that persisted into modern scholarship. Recent studies of the archaeology and the geographical history of late antique Palestine make clear that monasticism (of men and women) was an integral component of Palestinian Christian society in the country as a whole. But it is mainly the rich literary legacy of Gaza that serves to enrich and somewhat correct the skewed historical picture of late antique Palestinian monasticism.

We have sketched the evolution of kernel of anchorites gathered around Hilarion and Silvanus into an elaborate coenobitic community, flourishing in the time of Abba Isaiah, Peter the Iberian and his disciples, and the Old Men and Dorotheus. Nevertheless, we do not claim to discern here an exclusive preference for a coenobitic pattern of settlement in the school of Gaza, nor a straightforward development from a hermitic to a coenobitic way of life. The emerging historical picture is much more complex. On the one hand Barsanuphius explicitly declared that perfection could only be attained in solitude;¹ on the other hand the monastery of Abba Isaiah as well

¹ *Questions and Answers* 90.

as that of Barsanuphius, John, and Seridus combined forms of hermitic life outside the monastery with the coenobitic community. Moreover, monks within the walls of the coenobium also practiced seclusion as part of their daily routine.² These sixth-century monks still deliberated such questions as “In what way shall the monk living in the coenobium be saved?” and “What is the advantage of the one who dwells where the holy fathers are?” The prevailing belief was that proximity to the fathers in the monastery guaranteed a good monastic training, and that the monastery was the ideal locus of salvation due to the “power of the fathers.”³

Indeed the monasticism of Gaza produced a rare chain of charismatic pedagogues who, although themselves educated, advocated practical devotion rather than learning and theological discourse. Chief among them was Barsanuphius, who appears as the divine man *par excellence*, communicating through the “alphabet of the mind,” deciphering people’s thoughts, bearing their sins and sharing their penitence, and commanding their souls until death and even beyond. With Barsanuphius who spoke “from God” heaven, in the monastery, was perceived to be closer than ever. It has been possible to reach these conclusions thanks to the uncommon nature of the Gaza corpus, which goes a long way in revealing Gaza monasticism’s most intimate secrets and satisfying some of our curiosity and historical voyeurism.

² See, for example, *ibid.*, 211.

³ *Ibid.*, 582.

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INDEX OF NAMES AND SUBJECTS

- Abba Agathon 164
 Abba Arsenius 110
 Abba Elpidius 20
 Abba Irenaeus 7
 Abba Isaiah 2, 5, 7, 8n., 20–24,
 27–29, 32, 34n., 37–39, 54, 82, 83,
 85, 90n., 91, 99, 100n., 104, 117,
 124, 128–133, 136, 138, 139, 142,
 143, 147, 152, 155, 171, 174, 176,
 178, 183–189, 194, 195, 197,
 199–202, 206, 207, 210, 213–224
 Abba John of Scetis 147
 Abba Lucius 171
 Abba Moses 171
 Abraham 66
Acedia, see Despondency.
 Acephaloi 219
 Adam 122, 123, 132, 142, 143, 188n.
 Aelianus 40–41, 98, 139, 151, 154,
 208, 209, 212
 Aeneas of Gaza 4, 19, 22, 32
 Agriculture 84
 Agnoetae 219
 Ajax (monk-bishop) 17
 Alaphion 13
 Alphabet, spiritual alphabet 107–111,
 119, 121–123, 125, 128, 225
 Alphabetic code 107, 112
 Ammonas 165n.
 Ammonius (of Capharcobra) 16
 Anastasius (emperor) 29, 30, 32, 35,
 57, 214
 Anastasius (monk) 34
 Anchoritic, hermitic monasticism 3, 5,
 6, 12, 13, 19, 24, 32, 34, 44, 82,
 127, 149, 165, 184, 197, 198,
 202–206, 224, 225
 Andrew (monk) 125, 150, 167, 174
 Angels, angelology 102, 111, 112,
 117, 125, 154, 162–164
 Anger 116
 Anthropology 117, 131, 181
 Anti-Chalcedonian 2–4, 22, 26–30,
 32, 34–36, 48, 52–63, 67–71, 79,
 81, 214, 221n., 224
 See also Monophysitism.
 Anti-Chalcedonian rebellion 25,
 27n., 34n., 47, 52, 53, 57n., 83
 Anti-intellectuals 22, 99, 100n.
 Antichrist 57, 58
 Antony 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 23, 140,
 147n., 165n.
 Apatheia 141, 143, 157, 174, 175, 197
 Aphrahat 75, 76
 Archeology 2, 9, 14, 46n., 224
 Aristotle 22
 Armenia, Armenians 74, 75
 Athanasius 177
 Avarice 116, 134,
 Baptism 143
 Barbarian conquests 57
 Barsanuphians 219, 220
 Barsanuphius 4, 5, 7, 20, 32, 42–44,
 107, 109, 110, 112–121, 123–126,
 131, 135, 140, 142, 143, 147, 149,
 150, 152, 153, 155, 162, 163, 165,
 168, 172, 173, 175, 179–181, 188,
 190, 191, 194, 196, 197, 201, 204,
 210, 213–215, 220–223, 225
 Barsanuphius and John 2, 21–23,
 36–41, 82–106, 108, 133, 134,
 137, 138, 142, 165–167, 173, 174,
 176, 179–181, 183–187, 192, 193,
 202, 203, 216–218
 See also Barsanuphius, John
 Basil of Caesarea 4, 30, 31, 39, 43,
 45, 129, 137, 145n., 147, 149, 151,
 152, 154, 156, 167, 169, 171n., 181,
 183, 184, 187n., 189, 191n., 194,
 195, 198, 200n., 206, 207, 209, 211,
 212, 223
 Basiliscus (emperor) 59
 Bath 85, 192, 193,
 Beirut (Berytus) law school 22, 28,
 29, 34, 54
 Beirut circle 32, 214, 215
 Bible, see Scriptures.
 Calandion 29n.
 Cassian 4, 139, 166, 184n.–186n.,
 188, 189, 205, 206
 Chalcedon (Council) 3, 19, 21–23n.,
 25–27, 30, 34n., 35, 36, 47, 48, 52,
 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 83, 131, 215,
 217

- Chalcedonians, Chalcedonian 3, 4,
 28, 32, 35, 48, 52n., 53, 57–61, 81,
 82, 131, 213–216, 221, 222, 224
 Chariot races 85, 211
 Charisma 3, 5, 39, 48, 50, 53,
 89–91, 95, 98, 99, 105, 108, 112, 225
 Chariton 8
 Choziba (monastery) 196n.
 Christology 3, 35, 36, 54, 82, 213,
 218, 223
 Claudianus' monastery 28
 Clement of Alexandria 73, 150, 160,
 169
 Clinic, infirmary 42, 202
 Clothing 189, 190
 Coenobitic, communal monasticism 3,
 5, 6, 44, 45, 82n., 92n., 136, 142,
 143, 149, 152, 197, 198, 200, 202,
 205, 224, 225
 Compunction (*penthos*), weeping, tears
 102, 129, 147, 176, 200
 Concentration (*nepsis*) 130
 Confession 130n., 145n., 154
 Conscience (*syneidesis*) 130n., 143, 146,
 157
 Constantine (emperor) 65n.
 Constantine (monk) 55, 56
 Constantius (emperor) 13, 16,
 Contemplation (*theoria*) 182, 205
 See also Meditation.
 Cosmogony 120
 Cosmology 120, 124
 Creation 133
 Crispion 16
 Cryptic language 107–110, 112
 See also Spiritual language.
 Crypto-Monophysites 37n., 215, 218,
 222
 Cyril of Alexandria 50
 Cyril of Jerusalem 57, 80n.
 Cyril of Scythopolis 1, 35n., 57, 224

Daimones 161
 Damian of Alexandria 219, 220
 Day of Judgement 103, 125
 Deification (*theosis*) 93–96, 182
 Demons, devil, satan, demonology 33,
 54, 57, 74, 84, 88, 94, 95, 101–104,
 116n., 117, 119, 128–132, 135, 137,
 138, 140, 141, 161–165, 168, 170,
 172, 173, 177, 179, 185, 190, 191,
 195, 196, 205
 Despondency (*acedia*) 116, 164n.
 Detraction 116
 Diet, see Food.
 Diadochus of Photike 167, 178, 181
 Didymus 102
 Diospolis (synod) 79
 Diphysite. See Two natures.
 Discernment (*diakrisis*) 37, 62, 109,
 128, 130, 140, 143,
 Disobedience 134, 142, 204
 Distraction (*perispasmos*) 130, 200
 Divination 90
 Dorotheus 5, 22, 23, 31, 37n., 38n.,
 40, 42–46, 91, 92, 100, 106, 116n.,
 125, 130n.–132n., 134–136, 139n.,
 142, 143, 146, 147, 152, 153, 155,
 158, 163, 172, 173, 175n., 179–181,
 185, 187, 188, 190, 192–195, 199,
 201, 202, 206–208, 212, 213,
 215–217, 220–223
 Dorotheus' monastery 42, 43, 45,
 46
 Dorotheus (Monophysite bishop) 220
 Dorotheus of Thessalonica 220
 Dositheus 40, 43, 44, 90, 97, 98,
 173n., 180, 185, 193
 Dreams 84, 90, 96, 141, 177

 Egeria 76, 77, 80n.
 Egyptian monasticism 4, 6, 7, 11, 12,
 15, 19, 23, 27, 30, 82, 122, 127,
 165, 167, 170, 188, 195, 204n., 205,
 208, 223.
 See also Egypt.
 Elias of Jerusalem 35
 Elias (tribune) 26, 60
 Elijah 65
 Ephesus (Councils) 47
 Epicureanism 158
 Epiphanius (priest) 59
 Epiphanius of Magydos (Pamphilia)
 34
 Epiphanius of Salamis 11, 12, 16, 17,
 74, 75
 Eros 96, 128, 134, 137, 138, 141,
 142
 See also Sex.
Erotapokriseis 1, 38n.,
 Eschatology 111n., 125
 Ethics, morality 4, 5, 85, 90, 93,
 191, 192, 210
 Eucharist, communion 84, 141n., 198
 Euchites 171
 Eudocia 14, 25, 26, 34n., 48–51, 60
 Eudoxia 24n., 49
 Euphrasius 58
 Eupraxius 34
 Eusebius of Caesarea 65n., 74

- Eusebius of Pelusium 53
 Eustochius of Jerusalem 106
 Euthymius (abbot) 31, 47
 Euthymius (monk) 148
 Eutyrians 219
 Evagrius of Antioch 9
 Evagrius (John Rufus' brother) 29, 32
 Evagrius Ponticus, Evagrian 4, 5, 23, 24, 39, 43, 90, 93, 102, 116, 117, 127–129, 133n., 138, 141, 143, 149, 150n., 153, 158–164, 166–168, 170, 174–176, 178, 181–184, 186n., 223, 224
 Evagrius Scholasticus 105
 Evil 105, 117
 Exorcism 90
- Fall 132
 Family, relatives 128, 134, 137, 138, 205, 210
 Faran (laura) 8
 Fast 33, 66, 111, 147, 168, 183,
 Firminus' laura 46n.
 Flavian (patriarch of Antioch) 35
 Food, meals 134, 136, 141n., 156, 183, 185–188, 192, 195, 201, 203, 205, 206, 211
 Fornication 116
 Free will 85
- Gabriel (angel) 74
 Gate keeper, see Porter.
 Gerasimus 21, 44
 Gerontius 24, 49, 59
 Gluttony 116, 188
 Gnosis, gnosticism 119–123n.
 Gregory of Nazianzus 103, 178
 Gregory of Nyssa 75, 103, 147, 170
 Gregory Palamas 174n.
 Guests, see Visitors
- Hagiography 1, 8, 10–13, 26, 32, 62, 66, 67, 81, 91, 128, 224
 Hatred 116
Hegoumenos 114, 115, 119
 Helena 69, 70, 71
Hemotikon 22, 54, 219
 Hermitage 12, 13n., 19, 37, 40
 Hermitic, eremitic, monasticism. See Anchoritic monasticism.
 Hesychas 16
Hesychia 72n., 107, 149
 See also Silence.
- Hesychius of Jerusalem 221n.
 Hilarion 7, 8–15, 16, 17, 21, 26, 36, 90n., 185, 212, 215, 224
 Holy cross 49, 58, 69, 71
 Holy man 5, 10, 27, 39, 50, 53, 61, 62, 71, 82, 83, 85, 89–91, 93, 96, 97, 105
 Holy places 3, 7, 21, 33, 47–50, 55–61, 63, 64, 80, 81, 83, 224
 Holy Spirit 30, 94, 115, 118, 147, 169
 Holy woman 139
 Homoeroticism 199n.
 Hostels 42
 Humility 44, 66, 100, 109, 115, 130, 135, 136, 152, 157, 171, 176, 179, 202
- Iberians (monastery) 51
 Infirmary, see Clinic.
 Intellectuals 2, 3, 4, 100
 See also Anti-intellectuals.
Inventio 72, 77–79
 Irenion 25
 Irenion's monastery 25, 51, 52
 Isaiah (Monophysite "pseudo-bishop") 219n.
 Isaiah of Hermopolis 219n.
 Isaiahans 219, 220
 Itinerant (wondering, vagabond) monks 19, 26, 63, 207–209n.
- Jacob 56
 Jacobites 219
 Jeremiah 57
 Jerome 9–13, 15, 16, 59, 110, 121, 185
 Jerusalem (Church, patriarchate) 3, 11, 19, 34, 35, 51n., 59, 101, 224
 Jerusalem monasticism 14, 16
 See also Jerusalem.
 Jews, Jewish, Judaism 54, 84, 120–124, 145, 168
 John (monk, Peter the Iberian's heir) 34
 John "the Almsgiver" 46
 John the Archimandrite 21
 John the Baptist 55, 56
 John of Beersheba 38n., 109, 112, 124, 180
 John of Beth Aptonia 27n.
 John Chrysostom 148, 149
 John Climacus 111, 112, 151
 John the deacon (monk) 27

- John of Ephesus 36, 214, 215
 John the Eunuch 19, 24, 25, 31,
 48–51, 68, 70, 72
 John of Jerusalem 79, 80n.
 John Moschus 7, 46, 59
 John the Prophet (Barsanuphius'
 partner) 32, 41–43, 109, 131, 135,
 136, 139–141, 143, 151, 153, 168,
 175, 189, 190, 194, 196–201, 203,
 206–209, 211–215, 218, 222, 223,
 225
 See also Barsanuphius and John.
 John Rufus (John of Beth Rufina)
 19–21n., 26–28, 30, 32, 49, 50,
 52–55, 57, 60–62, 64–72, 77, 78,
 80n., 81, 213
 Joshua 73, 74
 Jovinian 111n.
 Judean Desert monasticism 1, 3, 6–8,
 14, 16, 46n., 47, 83, 101, 184–186,
 189, 190, 193, 195n., 196n., 198,
 205, 210, 223, 224
 Julian (emperor) 15
 Julian of Halicarnassus 220
 Julian Saba 15
 Justin I (emperor) 36, 86, 214
 Justinian 36, 214
 Juvenal 25, 34n., 51–53, 57, 59

 Kursi (monastery) 193n.

 Last Supper 80n.
 Lauritic monasticism 198
 Law (natural) 143
 Law (spiritual) 167
 Law (written) 143
 Lawyers 89
 Lazarus' house 80
 Leo (emperor) 53
 Leo (pope) 57
 Liberatus 219
 Liturgy 158, 168, 172, 173
Logismoi, see Thoughts.
 Lot (monk) 151

 Macarian homilies 170
 Macarius (monk) 15
 Macrina 170
 Magic 84, 90, 120, 123
 Maiuma (Hilarion's monastery) 16
 Maiuma (laura) 34
 See also Maiuma.
 Malachion 16

 Mamas (abbot) 35
 Manicheans 89
 Manual labor 33, 195, 198, 200
 Marcian (emperor) 53, 56
 Marcus (monk) 18
 Marcus Aurelius 158–160, 177
 Mark II of Alexandria 219
 Mark the Monk 146, 167n.
 Martyrius' monastery 193
 Martyrs 79, 91
 Mawhub b. Mansur b. Mufarrij 219
 Mazices 7, 72
 Meals, see Food.
 Medicine 43, 96n., 134, 141n., 186n.,
 190–193
 Meditation 33, 93–95, 105, 107, 112,
 114, 119, 120, 124, 125, 129, 140,
 142, 157, 170, 174, 175, 178, 186,
 188, 195
 Melania the Elder 47
 Melania the Younger 18, 24, 49, 50,
 59, 80n.
 Melchizedek 103
Metanoia 145
 Michael (archangel) 74, 75
 Miracles 10, 15, 20, 30n., 53, 57, 62,
 65, 70, 71, 90, 91, 96
 Monastic culture 3, 4, 63, 121, 145,
 153, 166, 176–178, 195, 223
 Monastic *paideia* 83, 98, 125, 146,
 221
 Monastic *politeia* 22, 62, 63
 Monastic robe, garb, clothes 41,
 49
 Monastic spirituality 39, 94
 Monophysitism, Monophysites 28, 29,
 35, 37, 52, 55, 131, 133, 214, 216,
 218–222, 224
 See also Anti-Chalcedonian.
 Morality, see Ethics.
 Moses 50, 62–81, 124, 125, 177
 Mysticism 28, 29, 54, 75, 93, 94,
 112, 117–119, 121–123n., 168, 176,
 178, 181

 Nature 132, 133, 142, 143
 Neoplatonism 159
 Nephalius 35, 214
 Nestorius, Nestorians 101, 131, 216,
 221
 Netras 18
 Nicaea (Council) 217
 Nilus 171

- Obedience 33, 38, 44, 45, 90, 109,
 111, 136, 148, 150–153, 160, 176,
 202, 209, 217
 Oneiromancy 90
 Oracles, oracular 83, 94
 Ordination 87, 89, 95
 Origen, Origenism, Origenist
 controversy 7, 43n., 101–104,
 113n., 150, 160, 162, 163, 165n.,
 166, 169, 176, 177, 217, 224
 Original sin 142

 Pachomius 4, 15, 23, 43, 82n., 100n.,
 110, 111, 122, 137, 139n., 149,
 165n., 183, 185n.–187n., 188, 198,
 199, 205, 206, 209–211, 223
 Pagans, paganism 84, 88, 89,
 159–162
 Palladius 186n.
 Paradise 103, 132, 142
Parresia, intimacy with God 62, 93,
 96
 Passarion 34n., 51
 Passions 96, 103, 117, 118, 124,
 127, 128, 131–133, 135, 136,
 141n.–143n., 147, 149, 157, 164,
 174, 175, 179, 181, 182, 184, 187,
 188, 197, 201
 Paul, Pauline 65n., 94, 104, 133
 Paul of Elusa 66n.
 Paul of Maiuma 25, 52
 Paul of Temma 165
 Paula 121
 Pedagogy 98, 112, 114, 121, 225
 Pelagius 79
 Penitence, repentance, penance 4, 84,
 101, 104, 127, 129, 145–156, 199,
 225
 Perfection 93, 95, 96, 99, 112, 114,
 118, 119, 131, 133, 141n., 142, 146,
 150, 151n., 153, 157, 162, 174–178,
 182, 187, 191–193, 200, 201, 224
 Persecution, expulsion 35, 48, 58, 218
 Persian martyrs (relics) 48, 49, 80n.
 Peter (Severus' disciple) 34
 Peter the Egyptian 21, 23,
 Peter the Fuller 29n.
 Peter the Iberian 3, 18, 19, 21, 22,
 23, 24–31, 36, 47–81, 82, 85, 90,
 213–215, 218, 219, 223, 224
 Peter the Iberian's monastery 26, 27,
 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 53, 61,
 214
 Peter the Iberian's circle 4, 36
 Peter of Jerusalem 37, 89, 218

 Peter Mongus 219
 Philo of Alexandria 73, 158, 177
 Phuscon 16
 Physiognomy 90
 Pilgrimage, pilgrims 33, 47–51, 56,
 58–67, 71, 72, 78–80, 83
 Plato, Platonism 22, 122, 147, 158
 Plotinus 22, 158, 159
 Poemenia 80n.
 Poimen 100n.
 Porphyry 159
 Porphyry of Gaza 90n.
 Porter, gatekeeper 42, 196
 Prayer 5, 33, 84, 92, 94, 96–100,
 108, 114, 121, 130, 134, 136, 142,
 147, 150, 151n., 158, 160, 161, 163,
 164, 166, 167, 169, 170, 178–182,
 195, 198, 200, 201, 203
 Individual, private prayer 157, 160,
 161, 163, 168
 Jesus prayer 178, 180–182
 Perfect prayer 174–176
 Petitionary, intercessory prayer 166
 Pure prayer 158
 Spontaneous prayer 158
 Unceasing prayer 157n., 158,
 167–174, 177, 180
 Preexistence 102–104
 Pride 116, 134–136, 197
 Propaganda 55, 62, 67
 Prophecy 95
 Proterius 53
 Pseudo-Dionysius 29, 55n.
 Psychology 4, 5, 24, 39, 95, 98, 105,
 127, 129, 132, 140, 144, 162, 164,
 167, 170, 171
 Pulcheria 53

 Quietism 99, 101, 217, 218, 222

 Rabbula (Rules) 137, 138
 Relics 90
 Remembrance of God (*mneme theou*)
 158, 168, 170n., 176–182
 Resurrection 102, 104
 Romanus 34
 Rufinus 47
 Rural monasticism 6, 90, 200, 205,
 209, 210

 Sabas 35n., 40, 50, 57, 58
 Sadness (*lype*) 116, 130
 Salamines 16
 Samaritans 31, 54
 School of rhetoric in Gaza 4

- Scriptures, Bible 33, 39, 92, 93, 99,
 100n., 124, 125, 129, 134, 157n.,
 208
 Sebaste (forty martyrs) 49
 Self-will 38, 44, 92, 129, 130, 132,
 134, 152, 153, 175, 194, 197
 Semi-anchoritic monasticism 5, 24,
 32, 92n., 199
 Semi-coenobitic monasticism 39, 198
 Seneca 158
 Seridus 32, 36–41, 98, 99, 108, 109,
 113, 139, 151, 192, 195, 203, 204,
 208, 209, 214, 215, 222
 Seridus' monastery 34n., 36, 37,
 42, 43, 46, 90, 107, 185, 186,
 189, 193, 197–199, 202, 203, 215,
 225
 Severus of Antioch 22, 23n., 29,
 32–36, 54, 82, 85, 213–215, 218,
 223
 Severus' monastery 34, 35
 Sex 96, 127, 138, 140, 141n., 186n.
 See also Eros.
 Shenoute 21, 40, 136n., 184, 186,
 188n., 199n., 200n.
 Silence 33, 99, 100, 107, 134, 135,
 187, 200
 See also *hesychia*.
 Silvanus 8, 16–19, 27, 28, 51, 224
 Simon Stylites 54
 Sinai (monasticism) 2, 18, 19, 45, 56,
 210
 Slavic monasticism 4, 45
 Sleep 33, 108, 188, 189
 Socrates (historian) 14
 Soldiers 88, 90
 Solomon's temple 70
 Sophronius 218–221
 Soteriology 131
 Sozomen 12–17
 Spiritual exercises 5, 112, 124, 145,
 157–182
 Spiritual father 38, 44, 90, 95, 128,
 130, 147–153, 156, 202
 Spiritual guidance, direction 20–24n.,
 37–39, 43, 44, 51, 83, 92n., 107,
 114, 115, 121, 124, 125, 138, 168,
 171, 176, 202, 216
 Spiritual language 111
 See also Cryptic language.
 Spiritual leadership, authority 3, 82,
 83, 85, 88, 90, 92, 95, 98, 99, 108,
 109, 124, 125, 147, 148
 Stephen (deacon) 19, 27n.
 Stephen (protomartyr) 49, 56, 80n.
 Stoicism 158, 159
 Syrian monasticism 1n., 4, 9, 17, 27,
 36, 82, 90, 138, 189, 205
 Tarasius of Constantinople 221
 Tertullian 161–163
 Theatre 88
 Theodore (monk) 105
 Theodore (abbot of Romanus'
 monastery) 36
 Theodore of Antioch 23n.
 Theodore of Ascalon 28, 30, 31, 35
 Theodore of Studios 218, 220, 221
 Theodore of Sykeon 50n.
 Theodoret of Cyrrhus 1, 191n.
 Theodosians 220
 Theodosius I 17
 Theodosius II 24, 48, 49, 53, 71
 Theodosius (rebel patriarch) 25, 52,
 53, 56
 Theodosius (abbot) 57, 58
 Theognius 66
 Theology 5, 22, 29, 44, 55, 57, 58,
 61, 62, 78, 99–101, 103, 104, 113,
 131, 133n., 134, 142, 148, 150, 151,
 166, 176, 178, 217, 218, 222, 223,
 225
 Theophanes 220
Theopraxis 114, 121
 Therapeutae 177
 Thoughts, *logismoi* 33, 116, 117,
 124n., 127, 128, 130, 131, 134, 137,
 140, 152, 153, 163, 164, 170, 172,
 178, 179, 185, 195
 Thouth 123
 Timotheus Presbyter 219
 Timothy of Alexandria 28, 53, 54
 Tome of Leo 57
 Trinity 98, 125
Trisagion 167, 172
 Two natures, diphysite 57, 58, 133,
 216
 Unity of soul (*homopsychia*) 148
 Upper room (of the disciples) 80
 Urbicia 58
 Vainglory 116, 133, 136, 191n., 194
 Valentinian III 24n., 49
 Vigils 33
 Violence 200, 201
 Visions 30n., 55n., 56, 60, 61,
 77–79n., 98
 Visitors, guests, hospitality 5, 134,
 196, 200, 205–208

- Wine 183–185
 Women 134, 136, 138–140
 Work, see Manual labor.
Xeniteia (Syriac *aksenaiutha*) 27, 61, 63,
 64, 66, 68, 208
 Zacharias (abbot) 17, 18
 Zacharias the Rhetor (Scholasticus)
 20, 26n., 29, 32, 33, 35, 54, 55, 58,
 213, 214, 219
 Zechariah son of Jehoiada 18
 Zeno (emperor) 23, 28, 54, 219
 Zeno (monk-bishop) 17
 Zeno (monk) 18–20, 24, 25, 51, 99,
 131n., 217n., 223
 Zosimas 44, 132n., 216
 Zosimos (Egyptian alchemist) 122,
 123
 Zosimus 56

INDEX OF PLACES

- Acre 28
 Alexandria 6, 10, 12, 13, 28, 29, 35,
 36, 51, 53, 54, 214
 Anastasis (church) 49, 50, 57, 59,
 68–70
 Antinoë 83
 Antioch 29, 34n., 35, 42
 Aphthoria 28, 54n.
 Arabia 54, 60
 Ascalon 26, 27, 28, 213
 Ascension (church) 58, 59, 68, 80
 Asia Minor 49, 82
 Athos 45
 Azotus 26, 213
- Baal-Pe'or 77
 Baar 65
 Beit Lahiya 13n.
 Beit Pe'or 74, 76
 Beit Thafsha 60, 80
 Beth Dallatha 21, 27
 Bethel 56
 Bethleä 12, 13, 16
 Bethlehem 12, 59, 80
 Bitulion 17
- Caesarea (Palestine) 28, 34, 44, 54,
 86
 Calvary, Golgotha 60, 69, 70, 79
 Caphar Aphta 28
 Caphar She'artha 19, 25, 27
 Caphar Zacharia 18
 Cave of Machpela 77
 Colluthus (shrine) 83
 Constantinople 13, 23–25, 28, 32, 35,
 47–49, 51, 54, 68, 72, 86, 88
 Crete 58
 Cyprus 9, 16, 50
- David's tower 24, 51
 Deir al-Nuseirat (monastery) 193
- Edessa 15
 Egypt 8n., 10, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21,
 22n., 25, 26, 28, 36, 53, 68, 71, 83,
 122
 Eleona (church) 80n.
 Eleutheopolis 12, 17, 18, 21, 28, 34
 Emmaus (Nicomolis) 20
- Gerar 16, 18, 27
 Gerarit 17n.
 Gethsemane 80
- Hebron 77n.
 Holy Sepulchre 59, 60, 79
- Iberia (Georgia) 48, 50
 Iconium 8
- Jamnia 26, 30
 Jehoshaphat Valley 80n.
 Jericho 44
 Jerusalem 7, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 33,
 47–52, 54, 56, 57, 63, 64, 66n., 68,
 69, 79–81, 83, 211, 224
 Job (tomb) 77n.
 Jordan, Jordan Valley 21, 211
- Kanopis 27
 Kellia 17, 167
- Livias 60, 71
- Madaba 65, 71
 Maiuma 12, 17, 25, 27, 28, 31, 41,
 43, 46, 52, 213, 214
 Moab 77
 Mount Nebo 50, 64, 71–77
 Mount of Olives 24, 47, 49, 51, 59,
 69, 80n.
 Mount Sinai 16, 72, 111, 154
 Mount Zion 80n.
- Nativity (church) 59
 Nebo (village) 77
 Nitria 17, 167, 184, 198
- Oxyrhynchus 53
- Panopolis 122
 Paralytic (church) 80
 Paran 18
 Peleia 26, 27, 53
 Phoenicia 22, 28, 29, 36, 54
 Pilate (church) 80
- Rachel's tomb 80
 Rome 13

- Scetis 6, 7, 17, 20, 44, 72, 167, 195
Sebaste (Palestine) 55, 56
Siloam (church) 80
Sion (church) 51, 80
Sozopolis 33
Stephen (protomartyr, church) 50, 79
Stephen (protomartyr, tomb) 79
Syria 13, 49
Tekoa 34n.
Tel Haror 16n.
Thabatha, 9, 21, 22n., 26, 27, 34n.,
36, 214, 215
Transjordan 50, 60
Tyre 44
Umm al-Tut 9n.

INDEX OF BIBLICAL VERSES

<i>Genesis</i>		<i>Mark</i>	
3:22	143	14:14–16	80
35:19	80		
<i>Exodus</i>		<i>Luke</i>	
7:1	75	22:11–13	80
14:19–20	68	24:50–51	80
<i>Numbers</i>		<i>John</i>	
32:3	76	5:2–15	80
32:38	76	9:7	80
		10:30	148
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		17:21	118
6:8	124	<i>Acts</i>	
32:11	68	1:9	80
34:6	73, 77		
<i>Isaiah</i>		<i>Romans</i>	
6:3	172	12:16	108
7:14	118		
8:18	125	<i>I Corinthians</i>	
33:20 (LXX)	68	2:15	80
<i>Ezekiel</i>		14:22	110
1:13–14	120	15:28	125
<i>Psalms</i>		<i>Galatians</i>	
77:4	180	4:3	120n.
106	124	6:2	145, 150, 151
118:16	116		
<i>Proverbs</i>		<i>Philippians</i>	
4:4	124	1:27	148
		2:2	148
<i>Job</i>		2:17	118
15:15	19	<i>Colossians</i>	
<i>2 Chronicles</i>		2:8	120n.
24:20–22	18	2:20	120n.
<i>Matthew</i>		<i>I Thessalonians</i>	
1:23	118	5:17	168, 169, 177
6:6	179		
6:9	174	<i>I Timothy</i>	
19:12	96	2:1	166
25:31–34	125	4:15	124
25:33	115		
27:11–14	80		

Hebrews

2:8 173
2:13 125
8:1–2 116

Jude

Jude 1:9 75

Revelation

1:8 122
21:6 122
22:13 122